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THE STATESMEN SERIES.

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GAMBETTA.

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THE STATESMEN SERIES.

LIFE OF
LÉON GAMBETTA

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BY

FRANK T. MARZIALS.

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PREFATORY NOTE.

GAMBETTA'S earlier public life, till the end of the Franco-German war, lies, as one may say, in the regions of pure history, and offers comparatively few difficulties to the biographer. Whether he was right in endeavouring to overturn the Empire, and afterwards in so desperately resisting the German invasion—these are points on which a fairly complete judgment can already be formed. But when once the debatable land between history and politics has been reached, when once the biographer begins to deal with that part of the great Tribune's life which was spent in breaking down the opposition of the reactionary Monarchists, and endeavouring to found a strong and permanent Republic, then difficulties increase a hundred-fold. It is not merely that the materials relating to the later events are less abundant. It is that those materials are of a less trustworthy character—the newspaper as against the book, the biassed personal impression as against the sober recorded fact. It is, especially, that the fight in which Gambetta took so keen a part during the last twelve years of his career is not yet fought out; that, though he has fallen, the battle is still full of confused noise,

and dim with smoke and dust, and the final issue only matter of conjecture.

In the following pages it has been my object to remove Gambetta, as far as possible, even with regard to his later life, out of the strife of politics, and to look at him historically. No one can now tell whether the Republic, which he did more than any other man to found, will prove to be France's ultimate form of Government; neither can anyone tell whether the political principles which he advocated with such passion, and, as far as their essence was concerned, so consistently, will ultimately prove beneficial to mankind, or the reverse. But already it is possible to form a dispassionate, and, I think, almost final judgment, as to what the man himself really meant, as to the objects he had in view, as to the degree of rectitude and patriotism with which he pursued those objects, as to the place he holds among orators and statesmen. To help the reader to form such a judgment has been my endeavour in this volume. What the French call "reportage"—the anecdotes, the personalities, the scandal that in these days of publicity gather round a great public man—I have pretty resolutely eschewed. The figure of Gambetta is, and will ever remain, a great historical figure, and as such I have tried to treat it.

It would be tedious, as it is quite unnecessary, to enumerate all the books, reviews, and newspaper articles consulted in the process of writing this little volume. Four Lives of Gambetta are now before me: one, *Gambetta, 1869-1879*, published anonymously in 1879, and therefore incomplete, as having appeared three years before his death; a second, *Le Grand Patriote Gambetta*, by M. Alfred Barbou, pub-

lished shortly after Gambetta's death; a third, *Gambetta, sa Vie, ses Idées politiques*, by M. Émile Neucastel, published in 1885; a fourth, *Le Grand Patriote*, by M. Edmond Deschaumes, published last year. None of these can be considered final. The two last, however, may be read with interest.

But the work that must ever retain its place as a standard authority on Gambetta's public life is the excellent edition of his Speeches, published, in eleven large volumes, by M. Joseph Reinach. This work was begun before Gambetta's death, and completed in 1885. It contains all, or very nearly all, his speeches, accompanied, in each case, by such comments as are necessary to explain the circumstances under which the speech was delivered; and it contains also several of his early articles, a detailed medical account of his last illness and death, and a full record of the funeral honours paid to his memory. M. Reinach, who was one of Gambetta's friends, and has remained one of his most devoted disciples, has also published a large and important volume, *Le Ministère Gambetta, Histoire et Doctrine*; and further, a collection of his Despatches, Circulars, Decrees, Proclamations, and Discourses during the war.

Gambetta's part in the great struggle between France and Germany has been judged from a German point of view, but with great equity, and one may even say in a very sympathetic spirit, by Baron Colmar von der Goltz, in *Gambetta und seine Armeen*, of which there is a French translation.

Beyond this I do not know that I need extend my catalogue very much. The curious reader will find a good deal relating to Gambetta in the later volumes of M. Taxile Delord's History of the Second Empire,

and may also consult with advantage M. Jules Simon's three books, entitled respectively, *Origine et Chute du Second Empire*, *Le Gouvernement de la Défense Nationale*, and *Le Gouvernement de M. Thiers*. But if I once begin to enumerate the works, relating to the period of the war, in which mention is made of Gambetta and his doings—such, for instance, as Jules Favre's *Gouvernement de la Défense Nationale*, and M. de Freycinet's *La Guerre en Province*—I shall soon exceed all bounds.

The only review articles, among the very many I have seen, that seem to call for special mention are two articles by the Marquis de Castellane in the *Nouvelle Revue* for the 1st and 15th of November 1888, entitled "Essais de Psychologie politique, Gambetta." These are remarkable as being an honest attempt, on the part of an erewhile opponent, to really analyse Gambetta's teaching, and estimate the value of his influence.

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LIFE OF LÉON GAMBETTA.

CHAPTER I.

THE BAUDIN TRIAL.

1868.

A press trial under the Empire—Occasion thereof—The *Coup d'État*—Baudin killed on the barricades—The Empire falls into the sere and yellow leaf—Interest in Baudin revived—Demonstration over his grave—Subscription started for a monument—Government determine to prosecute newspapers publishing subscription lists—Trial on 13th and 14th of November 1868—Speech of a young advocate—Immense sensation caused thereby—That young advocate Léon Gambetta.

On the 14th of November 1868, some twenty-one years ago, the "Sixth Chamber of the Correctional Tribunal of the Seine" was engaged in trying a batch of journalists on the then familiar charge of "endeavouring to disturb the public peace, and cause the Government to be hated and brought into contempt." The trial had been begun on the previous day, when, after the usual preliminaries, an old and well-known advocate and politician, M. Crémieux, had spoken, and spoken with some eloquence, in defence of one of the accused. Now, on this 14th of November, another

advocate and politician, also old and well-known, M. Arago, had followed on the same side, and addressed the Court with equal fervour. When he had concluded, a young man previously almost unknown to fame, whether at the bar or in politics, rose to address the Court;—and of *his* speech it may be said, without undue exaggeration, that it marked an epoch, not only in the orator's own life, but even in the history of France.

In order, however, to understand the bearing of this trial, and how it came to acquire such importance, we must go back to one of the most striking episodes in the battle between Right and Might, known as the *Coup d'État* of 1851.

It was on the night of the 1st of December in that year that Louis Napoleon struck his great blow at the liberties of France. Almost before the late winter dawn on the morning of the 2nd, sixteen of the deputies from whose opposition he had most to fear were arrested and thrown into prison, and the Palais Bourbon, the place where the Assembly held its meetings, was in the hands of the troops. When the Parisians sallied forth to their work in the dim twilight, they found the walls placarded with a proclamation, addressed "To the French People," and announcing that the Assembly was dissolved, Universal Suffrage established in view of a new Constitution, and Paris in a state of siege. Such measures, it might have been supposed, would excite general indignation. There is no evidence that they did anything of the kind. The Prince President had been playing his cards with extraordinary skill during the last few months. If the ultimate result had not been fraught with such ruin to France, there would be

something almost amusing in the story of the means by which this man of halt tongue and enigmatic taciturnity succeeded in baffling some of the noblest orators who have ever used human speech for purposes of government. While *they* were speaking *he* was acting. And when the crisis came he was found to be the master of the situation, holding in his grasp the army, the police, all the administrative machinery, and being regarded, moreover, as the "strong man," the "saviour of society"; while they held in their grasp just nothing, and were discredited with the upper and middle classes as incapable of preserving order, and with the lower classes as ruthless in the repression of anarchy.

So the Parisians, after reading the placards announcing the downfall of parliamentary government in France, went, for the most part, on their several ways, this man to his workshop, and that man to his merchandise, little thinking how terribly the future of the country was at stake. Naturally, the Assembly did not take their dismissal quite so easily. But what could they do? What can a body of men do against a determined and unscrupulous adversary, when they have the support neither of the army nor the people? The deputies, never much accustomed to act together, met here and there in small groups on the morning of that fatal 2nd of December. Some succeeded in effecting an entrance, by an unguarded door, into the Palais Bourbon, whence they were roughly ejected by the troops. At eleven o'clock about two hundred and fifty, mostly belonging to the "Right," or Conservative party, assembled, with some show of order, in a large municipal building not far off. Berryer, the puissant Legitimist orator

and advocate, took the leading part in the proceedings. With his great voice he proposed to decree that Louis Napoleon had ceased to be President of the Republic, and that the executive power reverted of right to the representatives of the people. The decree was passed unanimously, and with enthusiasm. Shortly afterwards the deputies were being marched through the streets by a file of soldiers, and incarcerated in some neighbouring barracks. But this was not quite to be the end. Blood had to flow in the cause. The imprisoned deputies belonged for the most part to the "Right." The members of the "Left," or Radical party, were still at large. To them armed resistance, even under less provocation, would have appeared as a sacred duty. With feverish activity, and hunted hither and thither by the police, they endeavoured to stir the people to insurrection. They might as well, on that first day at least, have flogged the proverbial dead horse. Evidently some strong effort to rouse the popular feeling was needed. Accordingly on the next morning, the morning of the 3rd, fifteen or twenty deputies and journalists proceeded to the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, the classic region of revolt, and harangued the workmen. The workmen, who remembered too well the terrible castigation received in June 1848, replied that they had no arms. Nevertheless, some eighty or a hundred of them helped to erect a poor, inefficient barricade part-way across the road. Whereupon the troops made their appearance, and most of the insurgents fled. "Why should we sacrifice ourselves for the 'twenty-five francs'?" asked the workmen, alluding to the salary of the deputies. "You will see how men die for twenty-five francs," answered one

of the deputies who stood there, Baudin by name. Only about fifteen persons, including eight deputies, remained on the barricade. Of these latter seven, not including Baudin, went forward to remonstrate with the advancing soldiers. During the discussion that ensued the men on the barricade thought their companions were being attacked and fired, killing one of the soldiers. The soldiers replied, and two men fell dead. Baudin was one of them. His twenty-five francs had been well earned that day.

Thus died Deputy Baudin, bravely and in a good cause; but vainly enough, it must have seemed at the time. The barricade he had defended fell almost immediately into the hands of the attacking party. The armed resistance he may be said to have commenced, though it spluttered on for some few hours more or less fitfully, and once or twice with even a show of life, was, within four days, ruthlessly trampled out. Providence once more befriended the big battalions. The *Coup d'État* was for the nonce successful. Baudin's name passed out of men's memories, and for long years he slept well-nigh forgotten in the cemetery of "trim Montmartre."

But as time went on changes took place among the living, and the peace that reigned round the long unremembered grave was disturbed. It is the nemesis of a government like that of Louis Napoleon that it cannot endure failure. If the strong man ceases to be strong, and rules weakly and inefficiently, he ceases to justify his existence. He is not worth his price. So long as France remembered the political and social dangers by which she had been threatened before the *Coup d'État*, so long as the Emperor could point to such works of his as the humbling of Russia

in the East, the defeat of Austria, the making of a United Italy — so long there was no general disposition on the part of the country to inquire too curiously into the genesis of the Government. Its history was, as one may say, "taken as read." But in 1867 and 1868 things had changed very much. Time had enveloped in kindly haze the wild acts and words of the Revolutionary party of 1848. The Emperor had failed, and failed conspicuously and discreditably, in Mexico. The country felt—in an obscure manner, perhaps, yet most justly—that the victories of Prussia over Austria were in reality victories over France, and that in allowing Prussia to gain such preponderance in Europe there had been grievous mismanagement somewhere. At the same time the Emperor, with a view probably to the future of his dynasty, was making serious efforts to liberalise the government. The press was in a great measure ungagged. Papers that some few months before would never have been tolerated for a moment, now circulated comparatively undisturbed. "We feel ourselves more free," a French journalist said to me in 1867, with a gesture denoting the enjoyment of greater elbow-room. And to the Republicans, very naturally, recovered liberty meant recovered opportunities of attack.

About this time there appeared a history of the *Coup d'État*, by a certain M. Ténot. The book was eagerly read. Victor Hugo's scathing *Napoléon le Petit* had always been rigorously excluded from France. Mr. Kinglake's *History of the Crimean War*, which contains an almost equally scathing account of the events of December 1851, was, as being in English, unintelligible to the French public. It may be

doubted if many of the younger generation, which had grown to manhood between 1851 and 1868, had more than a hazy notion of the means by which Louis Napoleon had usurped power. M. Ténot's book came on the country, therefore, in some sort as a revelation. Among the figures that lived once more in its pages was the figure of Baudin. Certain Republicans, casting about for means of discrediting the Government, determined to make a demonstration over his grave. For this purpose All Souls' Day, "the Day of the Dead" as the French call it—the day universally observed in France—offered the most fitting opportunity. On the 2nd of November 1868, some few persons, twenty or thirty perhaps, made a pilgrimage to Montmartre, and after finding the grave—no very easy task, for it was of the humblest character, and quite forgotten—demonstrated, in the approved manner, with a little heated speechifying, and a little impassioned recitation, and the brandishing of a revolver. Immediately afterwards, the Radical press, not to neglect so excellent an opening for attack, announced a subscription for the purpose of erecting a suitable monument to Baudin's memory.

The Imperial Government, quite obviously, should have allowed the matter to rest there. The Frenchman is seldom enthusiastic in his response to an appeal for a subscription, and it may safely be affirmed that, without some very strong stimulus, Baudin's monument would not have been erected on a very grandiose scale. That stimulus the Government proceeded to supply. They announced that the instigators of the demonstration at Baudin's grave, and the editors of the papers which had published the

appeal, would be prosecuted. Immediately the subscription lists swelled to the proportions of a political manifesto. The dying Berryer contributed not only his money and his name, but a letter which Imperialism would have done well not to provoke.

The Government, however, at this stage probably felt that it had gone too far to recede. The trial was begun on the 13th November 1868, and on the 14th, as I have already said, a young and comparatively unknown advocate rose to address the Court.

Before he had spoken many words the audience were captivated by the charm of his voice, which was at once sweet and powerful, and they set themselves to listen the more intently. He began quietly enough, declaring that he should studiously avoid any such violence of language as might justify the Court in interrupting him. He then proceeded to say that he agreed with the Public Prosecutor as to the real question at issue. It was this:—

Whether, in a civilised country, state policy, issuing in a *Coup d'État*, can ever be justified, under pretext of securing the public safety, in violating the laws, overturning the Constitution, and treating as criminals those who defend the laws at the peril of their lives.

After replying to this question at some length and, of course, in a negative sense, he came to the special *Coup d'État* with which the Court was concerned.

Remember [he cried, in tones which had singularly deepened in power and passion since he began his speech, tones which had in them something of that "lion's brool" audible erewhile in the voice of Mirabeau], remember what the 2nd of December means! Remember what happened on that day! The story has just been told for us again by M. Ténot in all its heartrending detail. You have read his account, which is no more than a plain narrative of facts, but, from its very simplicity and impartiality, all the more scathing and revengeful. You know what blood, and sorrow, what tears that date stands

for. On these matters I need not dwell here. What, however, I would wish to bring home to you, to make you touch, as it were, is the nefarious conspiracy by which that criminal enterprise was brought about, is the evil that sprang from it, the harm it did to France, the confusion it cast into men's consciences. Here lies its terrible responsibility. Seeing this, you will recognise how entirely we are entitled to receive your help and protection when we step forward to honour the memory of those who fell in defence of the violated laws and of the Constitution.

Yes, on the 2nd of December a band of men, previously quite unknown, had gathered about a pretender. They had neither talents, nor honour, nor rank, nor position; they belonged to the class that has at all times been the accomplices of deeds of violence, the class of which one may say what Sallust said of the mob that followed Catiline, what Cæsar himself said when he drew the portraits of his accomplices, the class which for ever stands outside the pale of all regular society:

"Ære alieno obruti et vitiis onusti."

"A mass of men whelmed in debt and crime," as Corneille translates it.

In contrast to these malefactors, the orator enumerated the men who were opposed to the *Coup d'État*, and whom it had either imprisoned or exiled—Berryer, Thiers, Rémusat, the Generals Cavaignac, Lamoricière, Changarnier—all the most illustrious "representatives of the Orleanist, Legitimist, Republican parties."

On which side [he asked] were genius, uprightness, virtue? Everything went to rack in that criminal enterprise. Centralisation and terror [he continued] did it all. Paris was deceived with reports from the provinces. The provinces were deceived with reports from Paris. . . . The news was telegraphed through the departments that Paris was acquiescent. Acquiescent! It was being riddled with musketry, mowed down with grape-shot. I who am speaking these words—I pray you to listen to what I am saying—I had friends who were killed as they came out of the law-schools. They were unarmed. . . . And now, after seventeen years of rule, has it struck you that it would be well to obtain for the deeds then done the posthumous sanction of this court, and so prevent them from being even discussed? No, that you never will obtain. That satisfaction will ever be denied to you. For in this great cause there is no final

court of appeal. It is a cause that was being tried yesterday, that will be tried to-morrow, the day after to-morrow, for ever—tried without cessation or end till justice is fully satisfied. Do what you will, the acts of the 2nd of December will remain at the bar of judgment in Paris, in London, in Berlin, in New York, throughout the whole world, and everywhere the universal conscience of mankind will deliver the same verdict.

And see, this alone would suffice to condemn our adversaries. Listen! For seventeen years you have held absolute sway in France, and ruled—the expression is yours—according to your own good pleasure. We are not here to inquire what use you have made of her blood, her treasure, her honour and her glory. We will not speak now of her compromised security, nor ask what has become of the fruits of her industry, nor pause to dwell upon those financial disasters which, as all know, are exploding like mines beneath your feet. But what condemns you irrevocably—because it witnesses to your own shame and remorse—is this: that you have never dared to say, "We will place the 2nd of December among the great national anniversaries in the history of France, and give it honour and celebration!" And yet all previous governments have had a pride in the day that gave them birth. The 14th of July and the 10th of August had due observance. The three days of July were observed also, and the 24th of February. There are only two anniversaries which have never been placed among the national birthdays, and those two are the 18th Brumaire and the 2nd of December. And why? Because you know well that if you wished so to honour them, the universal conscience of mankind would say you nay.

Well, that anniversary which you have rejected, we claim it, we take it for ourselves; we shall keep it always, and without ceasing. Every year it shall be sacred to the memory of our dead until that day when the country, her own mistress once more, shall inflict on you a great national expiation in the name of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

The court presented a striking spectacle while the young orator, in all the disarray of his *sæva indignatio*, was thundering out these words. Invective as terrible had, no doubt, been hurled at the Emperor by Victor Hugo and the other exiles of the *Coup d'État*. But their denunciations had never been suffered, except surreptitiously, to cross the frontier. It was a new thing, amid the enforced silence of the Empire,

to hear so tremendous an arraignment addressed to a French court of justice and to the French people. The magistrate who presided at the trial is said to have had Orleanist proclivities; and certainly he made no effectual efforts to restrain within due bounds the lava-stream of the advocate's eloquence.* Naturally the Public Prosecutor was angry and outraged. He rose from his seat again and again, protested, tried to interrupt, gesticulated, vociferated. All in vain. "He wanted to stop me," said the young advocate afterwards, "but I submerged him,"—which was almost literally true—the floods of speech had gone over that unhappy Public Prosecutor. As to the audience—Republicans for the most part, and friends of the accused—their enthusiasm knew no bounds. At each point they openly expressed their approbation, and when the speaker finally resumed his seat, hot, dishevelled, with his gown awry, those who were nearest embraced him fervidly, and loud applause rolled through the court, and was echoed by the overflowing crowd upon the stairs and in the yard below.

That the Government, of its own free will, should have created the opportunity for the delivering of such a speech seems almost like madness. The Imperialists certainly had no interest in concentrating public attention on the *Coup d'État*. Rather should they have done everything to cloak its guilt and shame. Oblivion was their best hope. However, the mistake had been committed, the *Coup d'État* dragged from its obscurity. And who was this who had taken such immediate and dexterous advantage of the mistake, flashing upon the foul thing the light of his eloquence, and making it

* An eye-witness told Mr. Washburn that the Court were too stupefied to call the daring young advocate to order.

visible to all men? Within twenty-four hours his words were reported all over France, and his name, previously almost unknown, was in everybody's mouth. Who and what was he? Whence did he spring, and whither was he tending? Would he prove a mere gladiator of the tongue, good only for slashing and sword play, or a statesman and real ruler of men? Such questions must have presented themselves to many on the day following that 14th of November 1868, when the young advocate—his name was Léon Gambetta—made his great speech in the Baudin trial.

CHAPTER II.

EARLY LIFE.

1838–1868.

Parentage — Birth — Cahors — Childhood — Loses one of his eyes — Becomes a law student in Paris—Student life—Enabled by his aunt's generosity to start as an advocate in Paris—Life in Paris—Turns to Politics rather than Law—Contributes to *Revue politique et littéraire*—Chosen as advocate for Delescluse in the Baudin trial.

Of the young advocate's parentage, birth, and early years, there was not much to be learnt in 1868, nor is there very much to be said now. His father, Joseph Gambetta, was (and is) an Italian, a native of the province of Genoa, who had settled at Cahors, in central southern France, and established himself in business there as a grocer. A notable man, according to all accounts, this father of the orator—a man of ready tongue and picturesque southern speech, whose conversation is altogether striking. In 1837, being then about twenty-three years of age, he had seemingly so far flourished in his affairs as to warrant his marrying Madeleine Massabie, a young woman a year younger than himself, and the daughter of a chemist

and druggist in the town. Nor were children slow in making their appearance. On the 2nd of April 1838 was born Léon Michel, the subject of this biography, and not very long afterwards a daughter, Benedetta. Two children, a boy and a girl—this, according to French ideas, would constitute the very ideal of a family.

Cahors, though the chief town of a department, and the seat of a bishopric, is a comparatively small place, containing no more than fourteen thousand and odd inhabitants. It has its history, of course—for what ancient agglomeration of men has not? Dante, in his dread "Inferno," brackets it with Sodom, as a hell of usury; and, later, there are tales of surprise and blood, belonging to the days when Henry of Navarre fought the Huguenot battles. The town has had its distinguished sons also, a Pope, John XXII., and Clément Marot, the poet of the Renaissance and Reformation—to say nothing of the subject of this memoir. Some manufactures it may boast too—if in a very boastful mood, for these are of no great importance, the chief trade being in the wine of the surrounding district. As to general aspect, it may be enough to say that the town is built over and under a rocky eminence which stands within a wide loop of the river Lot; that the river is spanned by three bridges, one of which is turreted and very old; that the streets, save in the new quarter, are narrow and irregular; that there are several buildings of interest, and particularly a cathedral, dating in its earlier parts from about the beginning of the twelfth century, and with many subsequent alterations and additions.

It is in the shadow of this edifice, in the great market square of the town, that stands the grocer's

shop where young Léon first saw the light, and spent his earliest years. The building is of no great pretensions even as a place of business. On the sign-board are inscribed the words "Bazar Génois"—a designation evidently due to the owner's affectionate remembrance of his native place—and a notice to the effect that "Gambetta jeune et Cie." sell "Sugars of Havre, Nantes, and Bordeaux" at "1 franc the kilo." The door-joints, too, are embellished with designs of sugar-loaves. In brief, it is a little old-fashioned provincial Italian-grocery, not differing at all from other shops of its class, and very much surprised, doubtless, if houses have any feeling, at being dragged from its native obscurity, and made much of in paint and prose.

And here, even thus early in my narrative, two points may, I think, be noted. The first is, that the future patriot, who loved France so passionately and so well, was in blood but half a Frenchman, and only became legally a French citizen by his own deliberate act, after he had attained to manhood. The second notable point is that the future advocate of the "Nouvelles Couches sociales," the new social strata, did not himself spring from the workman class, the proletariat, but from the *petite bourgeoisie*, the lower middle-class, which had made good its claim to power in 1830.

When the boy was eight years old, a grievous accident befell him. One afternoon he had gone to watch a cutler, a friend of his father's, drilling holes in some knife-handles. The instrument used for this purpose was a kind of bow made of steel and cat-gut. Suddenly it broke. The sharp steel flew into the child's eye. We are told that the wound was unskilfully

treated, both by the local practitioner and afterwards at Toulouse. Be that as it may, glaucoma set in. The sight on the right side was utterly destroyed, and for many years, besides being greatly disfigured, Gambetta suffered at intervals a good deal of pain. At last, towards 1867—it will be seen that I am anticipating—the other eye was sympathetically affected, and, to avert further mischief, the surgeons declared that the sightless organ ought to be removed. So said, and so done. The orator was wearing a glass eye when he made his memorable speech on the 14th of November 1868.

Republicanism, like Roman Catholicism, has its pious legends, and at one time Gambetta's accident seems to have been used by the Liberal Party for purposes of edification. He had lost his eye, so ran the story, by his own act, and to induce his parents to take him away from a hated seminary at Monfaucon, where his childhood languished under the withering influence of priests. So great, indeed, is the temptation to show the future enemy of clericalism as thus early a martyr in the good cause, that though this story has perforce been abandoned as apocryphal, it has been tentatively revived in another form. M. Barbou suggests that he possibly "threatened to destroy the sight of his remaining eye if he was not quickly removed from that gloomy establishment." So hard do pious legends die! All, I think, that the serious biographer need note with regard to the Monfaucon seminary is that Léon must have been a very little boy when he went thither, and still a very little boy when he came away, and that nothing very definite is known as to the reason why he was sent to the place, or the reason why he was removed.

In 1849, or thereabouts, he entered the Lycée, or public government school of Cahors, at first as a day-boy and afterwards as a boarder. And here again definite information is rather wanting. That Léon was quick and clever, with an excellent memory and great readiness in the assimilation of knowledge, may easily be believed. We can also easily believe that he was an omnivorous reader; that he wrote many essays on philosophical subjects; studied Proudhon, whose heterodox economics were then in the air; took high places in his various classes; and was much looked up to by his fellow pupils. All these are quite the right characteristics for a future king of men, but not, after all, if we except the study of Proudhon, very distinctive. Almost as much might probably be said of many another clever French school-boy between the years 1849 and 1856.

When the time came, as it did at the latter of these dates, for Léon, now a young Bachelor of Arts, to leave the Lycée, he determined, or his parents determined for him, that he should study law. The father, from motives of economy, would have wished him to go through the necessary course at Toulouse. The youth himself, with higher ambition, made choice of Paris, and carried his point. Accordingly we find him, in January 1857, installed in the Latin quarter of the incomparable city, and forming part of that joyous student-band whose light lives, and almost lighter loves, whose struggles and shifts and expedients, have so often been described in prose and verse. Here we seem to get a closer touch of him than as a school-boy. His exuberant individuality has begun to assert itself. We can almost see him, in all the ardour of his southern youth, slim, active, raven-haired, with a more

than double share of vivacity in his one seeing eye, and can almost hear him arguing, orating, perorating, filling the cafés, and the silent streets, even in the small hours, with the thunder of his voice.

He was such then as we have known him since [says M. Alphonse Daudet]. He was full of the joy of life and the joy of speech. A loquacious Roman, grafted upon a Gallic stock, he deafened and stunned even himself with the clangour of his own words, made the very windows tremble with the claps of his thunderous eloquence, and then would generally finish up with an outburst of noisy laughter. He was already hailed as a ruler by the general throng of his companions. In the Latin quarter he was a personage of some importance, the more so as he received 300 francs* every month from Cahors —which was an enormous sum for a student in those days. We have become friends since. But at that time I was still a raw provincial lad, just landed in Paris, and hardly civilised. I had perforce to content myself, therefore, with watching him from a distance, admiringly, but with some little envy, placed as I was at the bottom of the table at which we dined every Sunday. . . . Gambetta and his friends were ardent politicians. From the Latin quarter they had already begun to lay siege to the Tuileries.

Joyous, exuberant, eloquent, such we see him in these student days. He is fond of mouthing out passages from Demosthenes, *orĕ rotundo*. He has a passion for the works of Rabelais. He disdains none of the pleasures to which the Latin quarter lends itself so readily. He has a great following, mainly of swarthy, dark-haired, hirsute young fellows from the south, who accent the last syllable of his name in an explosive manner, carry about with them a fine odour of garlic and cigarettes, and are altogether a crew of noisy and disreputable young gentlemen. But amid all this haranguing and riot, there is room, on Gambetta's part at least, for real work. He pursues his

* It is but right to say that M. Barbou reduces these 300 francs to the much more modest total of 100 francs.

law studies with quite sufficient assiduity, and in due time, viz. on the 19th January 1860, has passed all necessary ordeals, and is standing forth, according to the old-world traditional custom, to maintain his "thesis" against all comers, and so conquer his place as a "licentiate" duly qualified to plead. That he should show himself a doughty champion and disputant on such an occasion goes almost without saying. Has he not been drinking delight of wordy battle with his peers ever since he came to Paris?*

But though the young advocate had completed his education, the problem of his future was still unsolved. The Latin quarter is not a health-resort, and after defending his thesis he went back to Cahors weary and ill. Soon, however, home, quiet, and his native air restored him to health. Then came the question what he should do next. A kind of family council appears to have been held. Léon himself, feeling his own power, and filled with a natural ambition, wished to practise in Paris. But in order to face the inevitable years of brieflessness, money was, of course, absolutely necessary, and money his father did not see his way to providing. He had done what he could in educating Léon; Léon was now twenty-two, and must keep himself; and, as the chance of success in Paris was so very remote, would it not be better for him either to come into the grocery business, or to get some local Government appointment? The mother, in this discussion, was swayed this way and that between wifely duty and motherly love and ambition. On the one hand it seemed wrong to add to her husband's

* The "Thesis" is dedicated "to my father and mother," and to "M. Sisco, officer in the French army." By some curious mistake, the date of Gambetta's birth is given as the 11th of April 1838.

burdens, on the other it seemed so sad a pity to make of her young eaglet a shopkeeper or small clerk. At this point came forward a maiden aunt, Jenny Massabie, whose name will ever be remembered in kindly association with that of her nephew. She declared that she believed in the young man, that she had every confidence in his future, and in his ultimate success. Her means were not very great—she had from £80 to £120 a year—but such as they were she would devote them to the furtherance of his plans. She would leave Cahors and take apartments in Paris, and her nephew would live with her, and share what she had, and thus be assured at least of life's necessaries in the beginning of his struggle for fortune and fame.

So in the year 1861, the aunt and the nephew set up housekeeping together in apartments in the Rue Vavin, at the extreme end of the Latin quarter of Paris. The rooms were humble enough, and the furniture was humble too, consisting as it did of Mdlle. Massabie's little possessions, which she had brought up with her from the country. But if the surroundings were modest, there was a certain grandeur in the young man's aspirations, and still more, perhaps, in his aunt's entire affection and faith. She simply devoted herself to him, taking at once the places of a mother and a servant—cleaning, cooking, mending, opening the door to friends and clients, looking after his worldly affairs, scolding him perchance now and again, physicking him, loving him and believing in him entirely. A distinctive figure enough this Gascon old maid, who occupies, not at all unworthily, her tiny historical niche. She is small, alert, vivacious, slightly lame, with black hair and black quick bead-

like eyes, and an olive complexion, and she has the keenest intuitive knowledge of those who wish well or ill to her Léon. One is glad to think that he was not —I mean here as regards the heart of him—unworthy of her devotion, and that through life he repaid her love in kind. One is glad also that she lived long enough to see her confidence more than justified, and her nephew everywhere acknowledged as one of the foremost men in France.

Meanwhile he does, in many respects, pretty much as other young barristers do. He attends successively at the chambers of two distinguished advocates, Maître Crémieux and Maître Lachaud, and picks up what he can of the practice of the law. He joins a legal debating society, and perorates there to such purpose that Jules Favre, the great advocate, *bâtonnier* or leader of the Order of Advocates, taking note of one of his speeches, inscribes against his name these words: *Tu Marcellus eris.* He "devils" for his friend Maître Laurier. He gets a case to plead now and again—minor political cases and press cases occasionally—one of them, curiously enough, against the Delescluse whom he is hereafter to defend in the Baudin trial. And whenever he speaks a certain fiery audacious eloquence stands him in such good stead that, within a comparatively short space, he is not altogether unknown at the bar. In 1866 he has gained sufficient notoriety for a writer in the *Monde judiciaire,* the *Law World,* to sketch his portrait. Here it is:

There is a real pleasure in seeing him come forward, shaking his long curly locks, rolling round a wild eye, shaking the balustrade with his impatient hands, and in strong southern staccato hurling forth his extempore speech. There seems to be in him a kind of

mixture of the frenzied lawyer and the political Rabelais—though with more of the popular orator than the forensic disputant. But assuredly he has ability in superabundance, and a large heart and courage.

Rather "the popular orator than the forensic disputant"—there is but too much reason to believe that young Gambetta was giving less than half his affection to the law, and had a mistress more passionately loved. That he might have obtained a greater number of cases to plead if he had so willed it, seems indisputable. He possessed every requisite for success at the French bar. But with what must, at the time, have seemed something like perversity to his more staid elders, he took little thought of briefs and fees. M. Reinach, who was his intimate friend, and to whose pious care we owe the voluminous edition of his speeches and despatches—M. Reinach accounts for this as follows:—

To be born with the generous gift of eloquence is sufficient to satisfy the ambition of most young men. Fortunately for Gambetta, his conscience was more exacting. Feeling that he had it in him to deserve at some future date the gratitude of the public, he was hungry for all kinds of knowledge, and felt no hurry to throw himself into the battle prematurely, and insufficiently armed. This is the reason why he pleaded so seldom during the eight years that he spent at the bar before entering the Corps Législatif.

In other words, Gambetta, if this explanation is to be accepted as exhaustive, was devoting himself to general study—was, in a large sense, continuing his education during the years in question.

Possibly, nay probably, true to some extent, and yet not, I think, the whole truth. The fact is that the young advocate had turned to politics with an ardour and devotion that must have terribly discounted his opportunities as a lawyer. The year 1863 marks

a great crisis in the history of the Second Empire. In that year the opposition, which had previously consisted of five members only, swells to thirty-five members, including such giants of debate as Thiers and Berryer. Gambetta is already in the thick of the election fight that is to have such disastrous effects on the future of Imperialism. He agitates with might and main on behalf of the candidature of Prevost-Paradol, whose rapier-like keen pen had so often drawn blood in its attacks on the Government. Thereafter we find him day after day attending the meetings of the Corps Législatif, and even mingling, very irregularly, in its debates by vociferations from the spectators' gallery. All the time, too, he argues, declaims, orates in the semi-publicity of the *cafés*. As in the former student days, not so long since gone by, he had been a very paladin of speech, so now, a student still, if M. Reinach will have it so, he declaims to whomsoever will hear. The Café Procope, famous a century before as the resort of Voltaire, Diderot, D'Alembert, and the other Encyclopædists, now resounds habitually to the clangour of his eloquence. The players at backgammon and dominoes, the drinkers of coffee and absinthe, pause to listen in the midst of their games and potations, and are edified. Anon he passes over the Seine to the Café Riche, and there, among a more miscellaneous set of young artists, literary men, and journalists—by no means all of his own way of thinking—he argues and declaims still.

A Bohemian! Yes, a Bohemian without doubt—a young fellow who has not yet settled into the regular highways of life. But a fine young fellow, too—a young fellow full of the most exuberant intellectual

energy, and with a very evident future. There is in him that quality which the Germans call "genial," a something spontaneous, individual, overmastering. Here clearly is no "clothes-horse and patent digester" —to use Carlyle's pregnant definition — "but a genuine man." And his companions and compeers, even those who do not share his opinions, recognise his power, and, to some extent, even his superiority. M. Albert Wolff, of the *Figaro*, for instance, tells us:

> We all loved him for the excellence of his character, and respected him for his uprightness. The Bohemianism with which he has been so often reproached never for a single moment affected his honour. Gambetta was young, and with no more than the authority derived from our confidence in his future, he yet occupied among his friends and companions a position of supremacy, just as, later on, he was to be supreme among Republican politicians. This friendly deference sprang spontaneously from our recognition of a superiority which we all felt to exist, although we could have urged nothing in its justification save our deep affection, born of the real kindliness that seemed to emanate from his whole person. . . .

And M. Sarcey is even more explicit:

> What used to surprise me very much [says he] was the ascendency exercised over all the public men of his time by this young fellow, who was always most careless in his get-up, and had done nothing to make himself known to the general public. I was able to study here the prestige and influence of a really superior nature. Gambetta was, in one sense no doubt, nothing more than a young man of irregular habits and ways: well there emanated from him a kind of mysterious power to which everybody yielded. We have all heard a good deal about the subtle aroma of womankind—about him there was, as one may say, an aroma of political genius.

Not very definite perhaps, all this story of Gambetta's earlier life; so that it is with considerable satisfaction that the biographer begins to touch solid ground in June 1868. For on the 6th of that month appeared the first number of a short-lived weekly periodical, the *Revue politique et littéraire*, edited by

M. Challemel-Lacour, to which Gambetta contributed several articles. These articles are all, as might have been anticipated, on political subjects, and, though with infinitely greater moderation of tone, are conceived in the same spirit of hostility to the Imperial Government as the speech in the Baudin trial. The first is a clever attempt to demonstrate to M. Pouyer-Quertier and the French Protectionists, that the trade of the country is suffering rather from the evil general policy of the Government than from its Free Trade proclivities. Another is on the extravagance of M. Hausmann's administration of the finances of Paris. Another—to which Gambetta appears, however, to have lent only his signature—is on the then abuses in the army. Another is on the Budget Debate. The last, which appeared on the 1st of August, is on the Parliamentary Session of 1867-8. All may fairly be pronounced able, though not pre-eminently so. The most striking passage, from a literary point of view, is perhaps a sketch of M. Pouyer-Quertier as an orator. The most noteworthy feature, to me at least, is the adroitness with which the future leader of the Opportunists makes himself all things to all men, and seeks, without expressly abandoning Free Trade principles, to win the Protectionist vote.

Notwithstanding, however, the gleam of clear sunshine that comes to illumine Gambetta's opinions from June to August 1868, it must, I repeat, be acknowledged that the story of his life up to the Baudin trial is singularly wanting in definiteness. It is a story in which the dates are very few, and the facts hazy and blurred; nor without family records and correspondence—very possibly destroyed—shall

we ever be able to reconstruct it in full detail. Nothing is now really available save the generalized reminiscences of those who knew the young advocate-politician at the time when he was "mewing his mighty youth"; and reminiscences, as we all know, are far from possessing the value of contemporary records. Even so, however, enough remains to show us what manner of man Delescluse had chosen to defend him in the great trial. It has been said that that narrow fanatic of "the principles of 1793," who was afterwards to perish miserably as one of the leaders of the Commune, had hesitated to employ Gambetta's advocacy because the latter was known, or believed, to have gone, at some previous date, to Claremont, presumably for the purpose of offering his services to the Orleans Princes. Whether Gambetta's Republicanism had ever been so lukewarm as to allow of his visiting Claremont, I do not know*—the point is one on which his friends are very silent—but, in any case, as the trial proceeded, Delescluse must have seen that the choice in some sort thrust upon him was more than justified, and that punishment of a particularly severe kind was being administered to Imperialism. He himself, as the result of the trial, was condemned to six months' imprisonment, deprivation of his civil rights for the same period, and a fine of two thousand francs. But this to the old Democrat, who had before, and more than once, suffered imprisonment or exile, must have seemed little when compared with the triumph of his cause. He had accepted Gambetta's advocacy at M. Challemel-Lacour's request, because it had been urged upon him that this

* It may have been in 1863, when he was supporting Prevost-Paradol's candidature.

was a case in which a voice from the younger generation, bred under the Empire, would speak most effectually to the youth of the country. The voice had spoken, and the youth of the country were not slow to hear. Henceforward Imperialism carried on its forehead one dishonourable scar the more, and Gambetta became a power in the land.

CHAPTER III.

AN IRRECONCILABLE OPPONENT OF THE EMPIRE.

1868–1870.

Parties in France in 1868—Gambetta takes his place among the extreme Republicans—Offered a seat at Marseilles—Then in Paris—Programme of his political opinions—Elected in Paris at the head of the poll in May 1869—And also at Marseilles—Chooses to sit for Marseilles—Will the Empire attempt to liberalise itself?—Gambetta falls into momentary unpopularity—Formation of the Ollivier Ministry—M. Ollivier—His aims—Radical unsoundness of the Empire—Meeting of the Assembly in January 1870—A debate in which Gambetta intervenes—He declares himself an irreconcilable opponent of the Empire—Death of Victor Noir—His funeral—Gambetta defends M. Rochefort in the Assembly—His attitude throughout the Session—Opposes the *Plébiscite*—Arguments on incompatibility of Universal Suffrage and Monarchy—"Banquet of Youth"—Prorogation of Assembly.

So Léon Gambetta awoke on the 15th of November 1868—to use once more Byron's well-worn phrase—and found himself famous. He was now a young man of thirty, in the very fulness of his strength. He had gained the ready ear of the French democracy by his eloquent attack on the *Coup d'État*. He was, for the nonce, a popular idol. His whole previous life had been one of preparation for a public career, and here

was the opening for which he had longed. What should he do with the power placed in his hand? What part should he play in the great political battle?

There were, at that time, speaking generally, three parties in France. The first, which had a large majority in the Corps Législatif, and probably in the country, was the party of the old orthodox Imperialists, who rather hated liberty than loved it and regarded the Emperor's government, unalloyed with any reform, as the most suitable for France. The second, which was rapidly advancing in power under the leadership of M. Ollivier, was prepared to accept the Empire, but held that the time had now arrived when the Government ought to be liberalised, and bid a final farewell to the ways of despotism. The third was the party of Opposition pure and simple—not, of course, an opposition implying the acceptance of certain fundamental institutions, as we understand opposition here in England, but a root and branch opposition to the Emperor and the Empire. This last party was subdivided again into groups of divers power and influence—Legitimists, Orleanists, Republicans moderate and advanced—each group having its separate ideals of government, and being only united in a common hostility to Imperialism.

By the very mode of his entrance into public life, no less than by his personal convictions, Gambetta stood committed to the Opposition party, and, within that party, to the group of the extreme Republicans. It has been alleged, and probably with truth, that, shortly after the Baudin affair, "certain people of importance" endeavoured to enlist his services on behalf of the Government, or at least to mollify the rigour of

his enmity. Praise, too, has been awarded to him because he resisted these blandishments—preferring the arduous and rocky paths of democracy to the smooth and flowery ways of Imperial patronage. But here, I think, commendation is scarcely due. Far be it from me to imply a doubt of his real disinterestedness. When, however, we are asked to regard that disinterestedness as particularly meritorious, then we are bound to inquire into the circumstances of the time. Were they such as to make it probable that a young man of genuine power would best gratify his ambition by accepting the favours of the Empire, or by making himself the mouthpiece of the democracy? To this question there can, I think, be but one answer. In the latter end of the year 1868, and the beginning of 1869, the Empire was like a wounded whale, huge, but visibly struck and floundering. Its old despotic policy had had its day, though the legacy of passionate hatred accumulated by that policy still remained, and the new policy of comparative liberalism was still untried, was not yet even frankly accepted by the Emperor. The alliance offered to the young orator was thus only an alliance with disintegration and death. But, on the other hand, the democratic party was young, vigorous, renewing the confidence in itself so rudely shaken in 1848 and 1851, and bathed once more in a kind of morning-flush of hope. The moment, therefore, was just one in which prestige and power could be best secured on the somewhat cheap terms of a virulent opposition. In matters of government, no less than in matters military, the *furia francese* is only too often shown on the side of attack rather than defence. This is one of the curses of the country. And young Gambetta must have known

full well that his political interests, altogether apart from his convictions, lay with the democratic Republicans.

Almost immediately, though the election did not actually take place till the following May, the people of Marseilles offered him the seat vacant by the death of Berryer. And shortly afterwards he was invited to contest the "First Circumscription of Paris" against M. Carnot, a Republican like himself, but not of a sufficiently advanced type to satisfy that turbulent constituency. Soon he was in the thick of the electoral fight, making speech on speech, and issuing address on address. Of the speeches little remains. Effective enough for their immediate purpose, they were probably only of ephemeral value, and either not reported or have not been deemed worthy of a place in the permanent collection of his speeches. Nor does much survive of the incidents of the campaign save the amusing discomfiture of a commissary of police, who was ill-advised enough to endeavour to arrest the orator in one of his diatribes. Whereupon Gambetta then and there drew up a *procès-verbal* of the commissary's act—set forth in due legal form and phraseology the heinousness of his attempt to intervene in a free interchange of ideas between a candidate and his constituents—and having thus turned the tables on the unhappy functionary—hoist him, as it were, with his own petard—left him utterly limp and speechless during the rest of the meeting.

Though, however, the speeches have perished, the written addresses in part remain, and have special interest as showing what was the precise position adopted by the young statesman on first entering public life. "Like yourselves," he says, addressing

the electors of the capital, whose mandate—including such items as the abolition of standing armies, the separation of Church and State, the disendowment of the clergy, the election of all public functionaries by universal suffrage—he "freely" and "proudly" accepts—

Like yourselves, I hold that there is no other sovereignty than that of the people, and that Universal Suffrage, the instrument of that sovereignty, can have neither value, authority, nor creative power unless it is radically free. . . . The most urgent of reforms must therefore be to emancipate Universal Suffrage . . . from all undue, from all corrupting influences. Like yourselves, I hold that Universal Suffrage, if unfettered, would be strong enough to destroy all that your programme wishes to destroy, and to found all the liberties, all the institutions towards which we are striving together. . . . Like yourselves, I hold that France, the home of an indestructible democracy, will be unable to secure liberty, peace, order, justice, material prosperity, and moral greatness, except through the triumph of the principles of the French Revolution. Like yourselves, I hold that a regularly constituted democracy is the political system which realises most promptly, and most surely, the moral and material emancipation of the greatest number, and affords the best guarantees for equality in the laws, in the facts of life, and in social habits and manners. But like yourselves, also, I deem that the social reforms we have in view are absolutely dependent on the form of our government and the reform in politics; and I regard it as an axiom in these matters that the form involves and will ensure the realisation of the substance.

Social reform through political reform—the words were perhaps a little ominous. At any rate, Gambetta seems to have felt that in addressing the commercial constituency of Marseilles it was necessary to say something reassuring with regard to public order. The Empire had long traded, not altogether unjustly as the Commune was afterwards to show, upon the terrors of the country. If the Radical Party, under the Republic of 1848, had had it in them to exhibit prudence, or even sanity, the *Coup d'État* and its

consequences would have been for ever impossible. It was the fear of a reign of anarchy that had induced the country to acquiesce so long in the reign of Louis Napoleon. For the purpose of allaying such apprehensions, Gambetta spoke thus:

Vainly do they say, you represent anarchy, you represent mob rule . . . I hurl back such accusations at those who make them. A democracy, sincerely honestly organised, is the only enemy of mob rule, the only effective rampart against the nefarious attacks of demagogues of every order! Demagogues—they are of two kinds. They appear as either *Cæsar* or *Marat*. Whether in the hands of one, or in the hands of a faction, it is by force alone that demagogues desire to satisfy their ambitions and their appetites. Both kinds of demagogues are to my mind equally hateful and pernicious. But Radical Democracy, on the other hand, only aims at the development of justice, liberty, and universal brotherhood. It springs from the sovereignty of the people and its mission is to strengthen the sovereignty of the individual, and to ensure the government of the country by the country. Its right is founded on reason. Its strength is of the people. Its only claim is a fair field, so that it may *convert the majority* to its doctrines, firmly convinced that the day of its advent is at hand, and that when once it has been *scientifically* organised, it will give to human activity a most marvellous development. It will make us all politically more free; intellectually more wise; economically more easy in our circumstances; morally more upright; socially more equal; and it will establish order upon the just equilibrium of all rights and interests.

The colours here, as will be observed, are laid on somewhat thick. Even at the time they must have seemed to many garish and crude; and now, to the dispassionate observer, who has in memory the ways of the Commune, and in view the doings of the existing Republic, they undeniably look tawdry. But to the average elector of 1868 they appeared as the very culmination of political art. Gambetta was returned on the 23rd of May 1869 by the "First Circumscription" of Paris, at the head of the poll, with 21,734 votes, as against 9,142 recorded for M. Carnot;

and at Marseilles, though his success was less striking and immediate, for he did not at first obtain the "absolute majority" requisite according to the French Constitution, yet on a second ballot he secured the seat, defeating M. de Lesseps and M. Thiers.

A satisfactory result, no doubt, to the young barrister who, six months before, had been almost unknown. But very much less satisfactory as a measure of the political capacity of the constituencies by which he had been elected. For M. Carnot—the son of the "organiser of victory" in the great wars of the Revolution, and the father of the present President—was a capable and respected statesman, a man who had "given his proofs" as a Liberal and a Republican, and been exiled by Louis Napoleon after the *Coup d'État.** While as to Thiers, he was simply the foremost statesman and speaker in the country. To place Gambetta on a par with either of these two men, the second especially, on the strength of any achievement of his up to this date was absurd. He had yet to show that there was in him the stuff of a statesman at all. He had, so far, done nothing beyond making one very powerful speech, and a few minor speeches, and talking, if the truth must be owned, a good deal of democratic nonsense. If, therefore, the electors of Paris and Marseilles preferred him to Carnot and Thiers, it can only have been because they were captivated by his iridescent, frothy promises, and even more perhaps because they hoped to find in him a turbulent representative. How resist a candidate who spoke so confidently of the good time coming

* Gambetta was severely blamed at the time for standing against Carnot, and defended himself by declaring that he held the will of the constituency to be sacred.

for democratic mankind, and declared that the "only mandate he would accept was the mandate of an irreconcilable opposition" to the existing Government?

As the "First Circumscription" was evidently a safe seat for some wild spirit of the party—the constituency gave a further measure of its capacity by returning M. Rochefort — Gambetta elected to sit for Marseilles. The Corps Législatif met on the 28th of June, and the young deputy walked to the Palais Bourbon amid crowds of enthusiastic admirers. But he was now tired and ill. His throat had suffered a good deal during the recent electoral campaign, and, while the Chamber was tediously discussing the recent elections, he went to Ems to recruit. Meanwhile there was great and growing dismay in the ranks of the Government. The recent elections had more than doubled the numbers of the Republican opposition, and had greatly added to the numbers of the "third party," headed by M. Ollivier. A spirit of reform, not to say of revolution, was in the air. Even such old supporters of the Imperial *régime* as M. de Persigny and M. de Maupas seemed anxious to make a compromise with Liberalism. Would the Emperor give way at all, or would he stick to his old despotic guns? Who could tell? His constitutional vacillation was ineradicable, and his health had begun to fail. He swayed this way and that, seemed now to be on the point of yielding, now holding back. Finally, on the 19th of July, M. Rouher, the "vice-emperor," as M. Emile Ollivier had called him, presented himself to the Chambers, and read an ambiguous message from the Throne promising certain reforms, and proroguing the Chamber in order that the Senate might have time to revise the constitution. Against

this prorogation Jules Favre immediately protested, and was called to order. Gambetta, writing from Ems to the *Avenir National*, protested also, and urged that the Republican Left should organise itself into a homogeneous party, ready to act on occasion with the Constitutional party under Thiers, but pursuing its own ends in its own way.

Soon, however, the young deputy was to experience for a passing moment the fickleness of mob-popularity. "There is," says the poet—

> There is betwixt that smile we would aspire to,
> That sweet aspect of Princes, and their ruin,
> More pangs and fears than wars or women have—

and Prince Mob is, on the whole, even less constant than princes of the old-fashioned type. The Government had prorogued the Chamber to the 29th of November. The Opposition held that it could not legally be prorogued beyond the 26th of October. Either date could, I imagine, have been defended by plausible arguments. But as any stick will do to beat a dog, so of course the Opposition made much of the presumed illegality. Deputy Kératry exhorted his colleagues to meet in the Place de la Concorde on the earlier date, and penetrate, if necessary by force, into the Palais Bourbon. Gambetta wrote from Switzerland on the 1st of October, warmly approving this proposal—

> Too long [he said] has Universal Suffrage, that lord of lords, been held in leash by the Executive, which is, after all, only its perishable creation. It is time to put an end to this. . . . Ours be the task to defeat these miserable temporisings of a dictatorship which is dying of atrophy. . . . I shall be there.

Unfortunately, as the days went on, it became abundantly clear that a meeting on the 26th of October

would lead to a collision with the Government. Things were going well enough for the Republicans as it was. To run the chances of armed repression would have been madness. Even Victor Hugo from his exile did not counsel it. Accordingly Gambetta, and the saner spirits of the party, determined that discretion was much the better part of valour, and that they would not "be there." At this the less sane spirits were greatly exasperated, and called for the resignation of the members who refused to demonstrate on the Place de la Concorde; and Gambetta, like Mirabeau before him, was made to recognise the proximity between the "Capitol and the Tarpeian rock," and was openly denounced as a "traitor." It may also be worthy of remark that, notwithstanding the eagerness with which he had accepted the mandate of the electors, he now signed a general protest of the Left condemning all "imperative mandates," and declaring that each representative was responsible to his own conscience alone.

The Corps Législatif re-assembled on the 29th of November 1869, and spent the following month mainly in the "verification" of past elections. Meanwhile, after much vacillation, many doubts, many negotiations, the enigmatic Emperor had at last decided to liberalise the Empire and place himself unreservedly in the hands of the "Third Party." On the 27th of December M. Ollivier was able to announce that he had been requested to form a Ministry, having for its object the regular establishment of constitutional government. And on the 3rd of January the names of the new Ministry, mainly chosen from the Right and Left Centre, were given to the world.

Of M. Ollivier, on whom devolved the leadership of

the Imperial cause during this evolution, one would wish to speak, as far as may be, without harshness. Though he himself does not appear to be even yet conscious of the terrible nature of his failure, both as regards his master and his country, yet his fall has been so great, he occupies so poor a place in the estimation of men, that it seems almost like an act of cowardice to cast an additional stone. Whether the task, which in his vanity he undertook with so light a heart, was of possible accomplishment, may well be doubted. Whether, given the then available means, even a Pitt or a Casimir Perrier, could, on the one hand, have imposed his will on the Emperor, and, on the other, have overawed and quelled the revolutionary party, is questionable. One point, however, is at least certain, that if such a miracle of statesmanship could have been performed at all, it could only have been performed by a man, were he Pitt or Casimir Perrier or any other, in whom were combined the highest gifts of character, courage, intellect, and knowledge of his fellows, and a man, moreover, whose own utter rectitude of intention was unsullied by the slightest breath and transparent to all. And it is scarcely with such words as these that one would trace the portrait of M. Ollivier.

Nevertheless—shall I confess it?—there seems to me nothing ignoble in the object which he set before himself at this time. France has seen many revolutions during the course of the last century. Whether, on the whole, she herself, and the world at large, have gained thereby, rather than lost, is at least a moot question. Balancing advantage and disadvantage in that hundred years of history, and considering the present outlook in French politics, my own very strong convic-

tion is that the Revolution of 1789 was a mistake, the Revolution of 1830 a mistake, and the Revolution of 1848 a mistake. On each of these occasions a Government was overturned which, with all its faults, had in it the potentiality of improvement to a quite indefinite extent. And in the process of destruction there was swept away a certain irreplaceable something—a kind of instinctive confidence in the experiences of the past, and in the institutions that have stood the test of time, and a wholesome distrust of the power of reasoning alone to solve the complex problems of human society. Mr. John Morley has been at pains to show that at the time of the first and greatest Revolution, historical methods of reform were not applicable to France. One may at least say that logical methods have not proved a success. Nor is the cause far to seek. Logical methods have not succeeded because they are not in accordance with the facts of human nature. Man's development is a historical development. The slow successive steps by which he has separated himself from the brute have been taken instinctively, and, for the most part, quite unconsciously, and only to a very slight extent in deference to the dictates of abstract reason. According to the doctrines of the eighteenth century, still paramount on the other side of the Channel, and exercising no slight influence on this, abstract reason should be his only guide. Unfortunately, abstract reason, notwithstanding its high-sounding title, is not always sufficiently informed, and mainly leaves out of count all those better tendencies, instincts, reverences, social pieties (if I may so express myself), which are perhaps the best part of our human inheritance. Eliminate these, cancel man's past, and he stands face

to face with the brute from which he sprang, and the brute rises and prevails against him. So it had happened in 1793 and in June 1848, and so it was to happen again in 1871. Civilisation is far from subsisting upon the bread of the intellect alone.

Therefore, I repeat, there seems to me to have been nothing inherently ignoble in the attempt made by M. Ollivier to maintain and reform the Empire rather than destroy it. He must have known how little previous revolutions had done for the country. He must have known, too, how entirely unnecessary they were, inasmuch as the objects at which they ostensibly aimed might have been achieved, by regular means, more slowly, and consequently with better and more durable results. If with these considerations in view he determined, if possible, to prevent another revolution, and rather to utilise the existing materials than to sweep them away, and begin the foundations of the State *de novo*, the error was at worst not discreditable. But it was an error, and a grievous one. What M. Ollivier and the "Third Party" did not see was that the materials offered to their hand were worm-eaten, crumbling, worthless. The Second Empire had no real root in the country. It had not been born *viable*, as the French say, not born possessing the possibilities of life on the fatal 2nd of December 1851. With a statesman's true instinct, Gambetta went straight to this point in his speech at the Baudin trial. Louis Napoleon's rule was founded on a terrible act of wrong. The *Coup d'État* was a usurpation of a very bad kind, and accompanied by circumstances which one can only describe as odious. It violated a constitution, imperfect no doubt, but which the usurper had pledged himself most solemnly to uphold. It did

so at a time when his own personal interests, pecuniary as well as political, were most deeply involved, and when, without a successful cast of the dice, he was a ruined man. It shed blood freely, not merely the blood of armed opponents, but the blood of mere spectators, killed, as there is too much reason to believe, only for purposes of intimidation. It hounded its victims ruthlessly into transportation and exile. It alienated from the Government of the country the whole body of responsible statesmen. It demoralised the army, by using the army for party purposes and as an arbiter in civil affairs. It inaugurated a *régime* which could only be maintained by espionage and tyranny. And it did all this on grounds miserably insufficient, for though the outlook of France at the end of 1851 was dark, it was by no means desperate.

With these antecedents, there is small room for wonder that the Empire failed throughout to enlist the sympathies and services of the nobler spirits in France. The men who helped to found it were certainly not men to whom the country could look with any degree of enthusiasm. Persigny was a sort of mystic, with a mystic's faith in the Emperor's star. M. de Maupas had faith too, a kind of policeman's faith in strong, government and the short sword that does duty on the other side of the Channel for the constable's truncheon. Both were so far respectable, in a relative sense, that they had convictions of some kind. But Morny, the sceptical gambler, what convictions had he? And what convictions had Saint-Arnaud? Could any one of the four be seriously regarded as a statesman? While as to the later recruits, the men who afterwards rallied round the Emperor—little men for the most part, and not one really great—they were only

too generally attracted by the loaves and fishes. For indeed the Empire had little else to offer them. Its appeal was to material interests, and the necessity for the repression of free thought, and free speech, and self-government. Feeding on such garbage, can one wonder that all nobler hopes and aspirations languished? As the birth of the Government of Louis Napoleon had been ignoble, so it is not too much to say that its life was corrupt. There were in it, from the very first, the eneradicable seeds of death.

This is what M. Ollivier failed to understand when he undertook so readily to pilot the fortunes of a regenerated Empire. But, for all his confidence, his optimism must very soon have been somewhat rudely shaken. The decree appointing the new ministry appeared in the *Journal Officiel* of the 4th of January. On the 10th the Chambers met, and M. Ollivier, already somewhat chilled by the attitude of the Napoleonist Right and the Republican Left, made an appeal to all parties to support "a Government which would bestow on the country progress without violence, and liberty without revolution." Whereupon Gambetta rose to speak. The Right had always been inclined to regard him so far as a wild man, a kind of swash-buckler of democracy like the bloodthirsty heroes of the Reign of Terror. They were the more surprised on the occasion of this, his maiden speech, at the extreme moderation with which he began. He wished to ask—such was in brief the purport of his remarks—why two soldiers had been transferred, as a punishment, to a regiment in Algeria for being present, while on furlough, at a political meeting. General Lebœuf, the war-minister—the same who was

so shortly to display his incapacity as an administrator during the Franco-German War—General Lebœuf replied, justly enough as to the substance, but most offensively as to the manner, that the army had nothing to do with politics; and he concluded by assuring the Liberals, somewhat unnecessarily, that if they attempted any revolutionary movement, the army in general, and the two incriminated soldiers in particular, would do their duty in a manner at once sharp and decisive. This was scarcely the language of conciliation, and came but ill from a member of a ministry* that was trying to rally the Liberal Left to the support of the Government. Gambetta retorted angrily that language such as they had just heard could only proceed from men who "felt that they were a faction in unjust possession of power." The debate was evidently not going according to M. Ollivier's views, and he hastened to intervene:

> We, the ministers of the Emperor, cannot admit that a Government founded on Universal Suffrage, a Government which has just loyally inaugurated the fullest constitutional liberty that exists in any country, is a faction wrongfully in possession of power. No, we are a Government regularly constituted, legitimate, constitutional, and using all our efforts to establish liberty. . . We do not accuse the honourable M. Gambetta, any more than we accuse those who sit by his side, of wishing for a rebellion. We esteem and respect them too much to allow of our bringing against them such an accusation: their very presence here implies a constitutional attitude which would refute the charge. We are convinced that between them and us there can, in all loyalty and honour, only be differences of measure, and opportunity, and detail. But between them and us there can be no question of revolution and rebellion. If they had in view either revolution or rebellion, they would not have accepted a seat in this Assembly.

* General Lebœuf was not one of the *new* ministers. He had kept his portfolio through the change in the ministry.

Here was the position of the liberalised Empire, clearly and plainly stated. Gambetta's reply came quick as a sword flash, and rang like a bugle calling to battle:

I affirm boldly that between him who has just spoken and ourselves it is not true to say—it would be an act of dissimulation to which I, for one, should never submit—that there is only a question of measure: there is a question of principle. If you wish to found liberty with the Empire, and to do so with our co-operation, abandon that hope, and for ever. . . . Our desire is that . . . in lieu of the Empire, a series of institutions should be organised in harmony with Universal Suffrage and the national sovereignty—that there should be given to us, without a revolution, and pacifically . . . a Republic. And speaking in the name of Universal Suffrage, which has sent me hither with a mandate from the people, I say that I in no wise depart from a strictly constitutional attitude when I demonstrate that there is absolute incompatibility between the present form of government, between the system of which you are the defenders, and the rights and aspirations of Universal Suffrage. But this does not in any sense mean that because I am dissatisfied with the present, I shall endeavour to find a remedy by an appeal to physical force. No, no! And this position is in no sense illogical, because I believe that in the light that proceeds from this tribune, in the fuller day of which that light is the dawn, there will come, little by little, in the conscience of France, a progressive conviction and certainty, and that the time will arrive, and is perhaps not far distant, when the majority which will have taken your place will be inevitably led, without disturbance, without rebellion, without using the sword, without any appeal to subversive forces, and by the mere logic of events, to inaugurate a new order of things; for you are no more than a bridge between the Republic of 1848 and the Republic which is to come, and over that bridge we are now passing.

At which point there are many among us who will doubtless feel inclined to smile. For "the Republic" has not yet established its title to be regarded as a universal divinity, potent for good in all places, apart from antecedent and circumstance. It is, at best, so obviously only a kind of local god, with a limited sphere of influence and usefulness, that the ecstatic

hymns of its French worshippers, Victor Hugo in chief, often produce an effect the reverse of solemn. Yet here I think a smile would be out of place. Notwithstanding the obvious exaggeration of Gambetta's language and tone, he was nearer to the central facts of French politics than M. Ollivier. It was true, as events were too soon to demonstrate in characters of blood, that the Empire was moribund. It was true also that in a country so devastated by revolution, the only government ultimately possible, and that doubtfully, was the Republic. Gambetta, therefore, is not liable to blame, or even open to ridicule, for the attitude he now took up, though one might have wished that he had looked forward with less confidence, and with a clearer vision of the dangers ahead.

Meanwhile the stars in their courses were fighting against the Imperial cause. On the 10th of January, the very day on which Gambetta was bidding defiance to the liberalised Empire, an incident occurred that affected public opinion in a most disastrous manner. Louis Napoleon had a cousin, Pierre Bonaparte by name, who was the *enfant terrible* of the family, and so little to be trusted that he stood even outside the pretty wide range of his cousin's patronage. Journalism of the fiercer type seems to have been his pastime; and as the outcome of a paper war, violent on either side, he had challenged M. Rochefort to mortal combat, and was himself about to be challenged by M. Paschal Grousset. The latter sent two of his friends, Victor Noir and Ulric de Fonvielle, journalists both, to bear his cartel to the Prince. They presented themselves at the house, and within a very few moments were seen to spring out again with all speed, de Fonvielle shrieking "Help! murder!" and Victor Noir

staggering for a moment, and then falling down to die, shot through the breast by a pistol ball. What had happened at the interview? The accounts given are conflicting. According to de Fonvielle, Pierre Bonaparte had received himself and his friend in a most insulting manner, had struck the latter, and then immediately taken out a revolver and discharged it straight at him, afterwards turning the weapon on de Fonvielle, who, being himself armed, had returned the shot, but ineffectually, and then followed Victor Noir into the street. According to the Prince's version, insult and blow had first proceeded from Victor Noir, and he himself had only fired in self-defence.

On which side did truth lie? Who shall tell? Pierre Bonaparte was, no doubt, something of a swashbuckler. But de Fonvielle, as the incidents of the trial showed only too conclusively, was not a man on whose sanity of spirit any reliance could be placed. The interview had probably from the first been conducted, on both sides, in a manner only too much calculated "to lead to a breach of the peace," and if Pierre Bonaparte carried a revolver, de Fonvielle carried one too. The public, however, were in no mood for philosophic reflection. They worked themselves into much the same state of excitement as when Charlotte Corday thrust her knife into Marat, and "Chabot, pale with terror," declared to the Convention that "they were all to be assassinated." M. Rochefort, giving a tongue to the popular feeling, wrote in his paper, the *Marseillaise*, on the following day, the 11th of January:—

I have had the weakness to believe that a Bonaparte could be anything but an assassin! I have dared to imagine that an open, honest duel was possible with any member of that family in which murder

and treachery are matters of tradition and custom. . . . For over eighteen years France has been in the blood-stained hands of these ruffian bravoes, who, not content to mow down the Republicans with grape in the streets, now entrap them into their foul dens so as to be able to butcher them at home. O people of France! do you not really think that the measure is full?

Whereupon, notwithstanding the orders immediately given for the trial of Pierre Bonaparte, there are public meetings held, with much waving of crape and cries for vengeance, and a great deal of heated oratory; and on the 12th, the day of Victor Noir's funeral, there is an immense demonstration, with much more crape, and *immortelles* in profusion, and more fiery speechifying, and singing of the Marseillaise by thousands of hoarse throats, and cries of "Vengeance!" and "Death to the Bonaparte!" and the unyoking of the horses from the hearse, and dragging of the same by the populace, and generally a determination on the part of the crowd that the funeral shall take place at Père Lachaise instead of Neuilly—a determination which, if carried out, would almost certainly have led to a sanguinary collision between troops and people. But with all this I need not here concern myself, except in so far as it shows that a storm of revolution was brewing in the beginning of 1870, and in so far especially as Gambetta is connected with the incidents here briefly touched upon.

M. Rochefort's intemperate article appeared on the 11th of January. On the same day the Procureur-Général applied to the Corps Législatif for permission to prosecute him on account of it; and clearly, if ever a political press prosecution is justifiable, it was justifiable in connection with such an article as this. So thought the Commission appointed to investigate the Procureur's application, and on the 13th they

reported accordingly. The Chamber wished to discuss the matter on the following day, but Gambetta, after angering the majority by dwelling on the "generosity" of M. Rochefort's "character," obtained an adjournment till the 17th. By this time M. Ollivier's Ministry were greatly fluttered, and had determined to treat the question as one of confidence. The closure was applied ere the debate had proceeded far, and Gambetta, who yearned to speak, was baulked of an opportunity of fulminating against the Empire. He revenged himself by a bitter attack on the Prime Minister. The latter had said that he and his colleagues "asked God, as a supreme favour, to grant that they might leave power without shedding one drop of blood, and in order that that may happen," he was continuing, when Gambetta finished his sentence by crying out, "it is only necessary that you should have a lightning flash of good sense!" "And you, M. Gambetta, a lightning flash of patriotism and a lightning flash of conscience!" replied M. Ollivier. This thrust evidently drew blood, and on the next day Gambetta returned to the subject, bitterly taunting his opponent with apostasy from the Republican cause. Nor did his intervention in the Rochefort question end here. That mischievous sciolist of politics was condemned by the Courts on the 22nd of January to six months' imprisonment, commencing on the 7th of February. On the latter date his friends in the Chamber raised the question of his privileges as a representative once more, and Gambetta argued, with a moderation of tone which ensured him at least a patient hearing, that in deference to Universal Suffrage, whose mandate the delinquent held, the imprisonment should be postponed till the end of the

session. It must be owned that some of the arguments used by the Opposition in this debate were not of a practical character.

Having so far indicated the attitude which Gambetta assumed from the first towards the Empire, whether despotic or liberalised, it will scarcely be necessary to describe at length all the debates in which he took part during the session of 1870. He spoke on the 26th of January against the employment of the army for the repression of a strike at Creuzot; on the 3rd of February in favour of an extension of the liberty of the press; on the 29th of March in favour of a law declaring official candidatures illegal; and on the 5th of April he delivered a great speech, his first really great political speech, against the proposal to submit the new constitution of the Empire to the country by means of a *plébiscite*, or general vote by Yea or Nay.

This last speech created a real sensation. Whatever we may think of some of the arguments employed, it showed that the speaker was no mere popular windbag, as some had so far perhaps been tempted to imagine, no mere brazen-throated instrument good for vociferations in the market-place and interruptions in the Chamber, but a born political orator possessing the faculty of so presenting his subject that even a hostile majority were compelled to hear and attend. Little as they liked his arguments, and uncompromising as were his conclusions, he gave them no excuse, scarcely excited in them the desire, to interrupt. Like the Ancient Mariner's auditor, they might beat their breasts, but they had to listen while the speaker argued that the new constitution was incompatible with Universal Suffrage, and that the

plébiscite itself, as being proposed by an authority outside Universal Suffrage, could give that constitution no validity.

But if the majority were outraged, the Republicans were immensely pleased. To us, with our insular habits of mind, our "imperviousness to ideas," the whole of such a discussion may seem academical, and to lie outside "the sphere of practical politics." From one point of view, how perfectly idle all this logic-chopping about the compatibility or incompatibility of Universal Suffrage! It seems as remote from the facts of human life as a discussion in Laputa. There would scarcely be any difficulty in proving, by similar processes of reasoning, that Universal Suffrage was incompatible with representative government, or any government at all. But before indulging unduly in criticism of this kind, it is necessary to mark a very strong distinction. An argument may be essentially worthless, and yet, under certain circumstances, possess enormous power of moving men, and so become a factor in human affairs of a very effective kind. Looked at from the stand-point of this last quarter of the nineteenth century, Rousseau's doctrine of the Social Contract is little better than the sounding of brass and the tinkling of a cymbal. And yet to such strains the Revolutionists of 1793 danced the Carmagnole over the ruins of France. The page in which John Stuart Mill describes James Mill's political philosophy is not calculated to heighten one's admiration for human wisdom. Yet James Mill inspired the "Philosophical Radicals," and the Philosophical Radicals were a very real power in English politics for a generation. And so, though Gambetta's arguments on the incompatibility of Universal Suffrage and the

Empire were in themselves naught, yet, as engines of destruction, they had singular force. The growing body of the disaffected seized upon them. The youth of the country especially hailed them with delight. Gone was now the cloud of unpopularity through which the orator had passed before the beginning of the session. His name was once more in vivid light. And the "young men of the schools," all that student band with whom he had mingled so long and so joyously, offered him a banquet in testimony of their enthusiasm and admiration.

Accordingly on the 19th of April, at the Salle Ragache, some six hundred persons sat down to dinner, and Gambetta, replying to the "toast of the evening," called himself the mouthpiece of the generation whose representatives were before him—said "fit things" on the decay of the Napoleonic legend, and on the coming advent of the Republic—exhorted his hearers to seek for a change of government by peaceable means and the use of moral force alone; entreated them to labour for the enlightenment of Universal Suffrage, concluding with the word *laboremus*; spoke, in short, as was but natural seeing the youth of the orator and his audience, in tones of hope and a cheery optimism, but in tones also that had in them an honest ring of manliness and effort.

Some six days before the delivery of this speech, the Corps Législatif had been prorogued, and the first scene in Gambetta's parliamentary life brought to a close.

CHAPTER IV.

COMMENCEMENT OF THE WAR AND FALL OF THE EMPIRE.

1870.

Incidents preceding the war—Responsibility for the war—The Hohenzollern incident—Meeting of the Corps Législatif on the 15th of July 1870—Gambetta exhorts the House to pause—The ministry refuses to produce despatches—Inferiority of France in arms and statecraft—When once the war is declared, Gambetta votes supplies—Defeat of the French—Chambers meet on 9th of August—Gambetta foresees ruin—The Emperor marches northward to Sedan—Where he is caught in a trap—News of capitulation of Sedan received in Paris—Meeting of the Assembly—The 4th of September—Gambetta tries to induce the mob to keep order while the members deliberate—The Chambers invaded—Proclamation of the Republic at the Hôtel de Ville—New Ministry—Gambetta Minister of the Interior—Estimate of his conduct during preceding events.

INTO the history of the diplomatic incidents immediately preceding the declaration of war between France and Germany on the 19th of July 1870, it is not my purpose to enter at any length. Important as those incidents may have been, they were in no real sense the cause of the war. That lay much deeper. When Prussia, having first attacked Denmark in concert with Austria, and then defeated Austria at

Sadowa, made herself practically the mistress of Germany, she effected a most material change in the existing relations between the States of Europe. A united Germany, under the sway of a strong military power like Prussia, was a distinct blow at the influence of France—a distinct menace, as events have proved only too conclusively, to France's very existence. Would this have justified France, even at the expense of a war, in resisting the unification of Germany? The question is one to which, I imagine, an affirmative reply would be given almost everywhere, except perhaps in England, and, of course, so far as this one special case is concerned, in Germany. For we in England are in the habit of taking a somewhat Platonic view of Continental relations. Happily protected by the "silver streak," we can afford to look calmly at most of the anxieties of our neighbours, and even, on occasion, to lecture them in a manner quite edifying. Why, we are tempted to ask, should one country repine at the aggrandisement of another? Do not all nations form a single family, and is not the advantage of one member the advantage of all? To which it may be enough to reply that, where our own interests really are involved, we are as keenly alive to questions affecting what used to be called "the balance of power" as the inhabitants of other lands. An example will show this at once. In July 1870, just after the declaration of the war, and while we were busy lecturing France on her enormities, Prince Bismarck caused to be published a paper purporting to contain a French scheme for the annexation of Belgium: The mode in which that paper came into existence, and its precise value, are not here the points in question. What I wish rather

to dwell on is the sensation it created here in England —a sensation due in part, as one is more than willing to believe, to a feeling of indignation at what seemed like wanton aggression against a most respectable small State, but due also, and evidently in much larger measure, to the thought of the danger we had run of having France as a neighbour on the Belgian coast. But if Antwerp in French hands would have been, to use the old saying, "a loaded pistol presented at the breast of England," a united Germany on the Rhine was a weapon of a far more deadly character ready to be discharged into the heart of France. The question for France was not at all a question of national vanity, but almost of national existence.

Looked at philosophically, from the moment that Prussia began to aim at German unity under Prussian patronage, a war with France became almost inevitable. That Germany should have thought herself justified in pursuing her national aspirations, at whatever cost, is comprehensible enough. But that France should equally have considered herself justified in resisting a change so detrimental to her interests, must also be regarded as comprehensible. And as Germany was the active instrument in the change, and was, by her deliberate action, altering the pre-existing condition of European forces, she must be pronounced the aggressor. As to the balance of advantage which the world has reaped from her success, doubtless it seems incalculable to German eyes. To other eyes, which see only too well the intolerable pressure of existing armaments, and the threatening cloud of war that lowers persistently over Europe, the benefits may seem very much less, and

not to call for any very enthusiastic display of pleasure or gratitude.

That the French Emperor expected, and was led to expect, some compensation for France after Sadowa, is clear. That he was thoroughly hoodwinked and beaten at the game of diplomacy by Count Bismarck, is even clearer. In 1870, when all hope of reaping a substantive advantage must long have gone by, he seems to have determined, but with his usual vacillation, to obtain an empty diplomatic victory over Germany, or even, in default of that, to hasten the inevitable war between the two countries. Very briefly stated, the Hohenzollern incident took place somewhat as follows: General Prim, casting about for a suitable candidate to fill the vacant throne of Spain, had pitched on Prince Leopold, a cadet of the House of Hohenzollern. The young man himself—a junior cavalry officer in a Prussian regiment—was nothing loth. The King of Prussia had evidently no reason to object. Spain showed no signs of discontent. Only the French Emperor was dissatisfied, and not unreasonably so, for, with an aggrandised Prussia in Germany, the presence of a Prussian Prince on the Spanish throne was not an arrangement to which France could look forward with complacency. Accordingly, pressure was put on the German King to disavow Prince Leopold's candidature. The King replied that as King he had nothing to do with the matter, but that as head of the Hohenzollern family he was prepared to approve if his relative drew back, but could go no further. So matters drifted on, war looking more and more possible, till on the 12th July M. Ollivier was able to announce that Prince Hohenzollern had actually withdrawn his

candidature, and that King William approved of such withdrawal. All difficulties now seemed happily at an end, and the Emperor should obviously have been satisfied. But on the evening of that same 12th of July, M. de Gramont, the French Foreign Minister, instructed M. Beneditti, the Ambassador at the Court of Berlin, to obtain from King William an assurance that he would not, at any future time, sanction the renewal of the Prince's candidature. Such a demand was obviously quite inadmissible. The aged King very naturally refused to give the assurance demanded, and also refused to give the Ambassador any further audience on the subject. Leaving Ems at this time he seems to have parted from M. Beneditti with perfect courtesy, but with an obvious determination to discuss the Hohenzollern question, at that time, no more.

Mr. Bright once declared, in a speech of admirable eloquence addressed to the House of Commons during the Crimean War, that he seemed almost to hear the rustling of the wings of the angel of death. To whomsoever had ears to hear, that rustling must have been terribly audible—mingled, it may be, with the groans of defeat and shame—when, on the 15th of July 1870, M. Ollivier came down to the Corps Législatif and read a statement tending to show, at least disingenuously, that the King's refusal was, both in substance and in form, an insult to France—and then proceeded to declare the imminence of war. But to any warnings of coming doom the majority were as the deaf adder. They applauded the Minister's words. They shouted "Vive l'Empereur." They were filled with bellicose ardour. It was in vain that Thiers asked for the production of papers. What! papers,

when France has been insulted? asked the Ministers and the indignant Bonapartist members. Then ensued a scene of indescribable tumult. The eloquent old man, undaunted, unwearied, speaking against a rolling fire of cries that he was a traitor, that he was dishonouring his grey hairs, that he ought to be hurled from the tribune, exhorted his hearers, with tears of patriotism in his voice, to pause before committing the country to war—to insist on seeing the actual despatches that had passed. He might almost as well have spoken to Bedlam let loose. A Commission was appointed to examine the enactments proposed by the Government in view of the coming hostilities.

It was during this sitting that M. Ollivier made the memorable speech—a speech which will, as it were, ring round his name for many a long year like a peal of bitter laughter—to the effect that he and his colleagues looked forward to their coming responsibilities "with a light heart." It was to the Commission that Marshal Lebœuf, the War Minister, made the equally memorable declaration that the army—poor deluded army—"were ready to the very last button on their gaiters." What could be more satisfactory, especially as M. de Gramont, the Foreign Minister, hinted mysteriously, but confidently, at alliances? The Commission reported at once, and by half-past nine at night the Corps Législatif was again assembled. When the report had been read, Gambetta rose to address the House. He can by no means have been a *persona grata* to the majority. By what miracle of oratorical art did he succeed in obtaining a hearing on such an occasion, and for such propositions as he had to expound? He dwelt, as was but natural, on the gravity of the questions at issue, and on the necessity

of considering them calmly. He lamented, rightly enough, that the policy of resisting the aggrandisement of Prussia had not been pursued four years before. And then, having gained the ear of the house, he went back to the points argued earlier in the day by Thiers, and Jules Favre, and M. Buffet. Clearly the Government had changed their policy. By what was that change justified? So far as appeared, so far as the facts had been authentically presented, so far especially as the despatches went, there was nothing that could be rightly construed into an insult to France and a *casus belli*. Let the despatches, let the reports of the French Ambassador be published. If the French cause was righteous, let France, let the whole of Europe, be in a position to judge of its righteousness.

What, you are calling on France to give you her blood and her treasure; you are making her enter upon a war which will, perchance, see the question of the preponderance of the French or German race still unsolved at the end of this century, and yet you are unwilling that the reasons for embarking on this immense enterprise should be shown formally, authentically, so that France may know, and Europe may know, on which side there has been insult and unjust aggression, and on which side legitimate resistance to attack! . . . I beseech the House not to interrupt me . . . and to hear my words without suspicion. I am seeking in this discussion to clear up one point only, and that a point which must interest you as passionately as it interests myself, viz. whether the course which you are endeavouring to make final and irrevocable will receive the approval of Europe, and especially of France. And on that sympathy—that sympathy which is to us an indispensable ally—you will only be able to reckon, when once you have drawn the sword, on one single condition, and that condition is that your explanations make it perfectly clear that you have been really and deeply insulted. . . . And I pray you to hear me when I say that you have not satisfied public opinion on this point by the quotations and documents you have produced.

The speech was the speech of a statesman and a

patriot, no less than a great political orator. But it was spoken in vain. The Ministry had little care to produce documents which they knew only too well would not bear the stress laid upon them. And so the country was hurried, on unjust and hollow pretexts, into a war not in itself unjust, and forfeited, as Gambetta prophesied she would do, the moral support of Europe. Poor France! when one thinks of the tremendous disadvantages under which she entered upon the struggle, and M. Olivier's "light heart," it is difficult to refrain from applying a very uncomplimentary epithet to that politician. Did he think perchance that he, or his master the Emperor—the latter a man already broken by disease and marked for death—was the equal in statesmanship and statecraft of Prince Bismarck? Did he believe that strategists like Moltke were to be met with every day, and that there happened to be one in the French army? Had it ever crossed his mind that a country with a Government compelled to court popularity at every step, and incapable of bearing the least strain of defeat, is scarcely in a satisfactory condition to undergo the chances of a war? That he had altogether failed to gauge the overwhelming superiority of the German forces, and also how long and well they had been prepared for this special campaign—this we know—as also that he was blissfully unaware how German statesmanship and the ineptitude of his own Government had isolated France from her natural allies. And now he was alienating all sympathies by declaring war upon a pretext disingenuously imbecile!

Gambetta was an ardent Republican. But, to do him justice, he was a more than equally ardent patriot, and one can pretty well guess what must have been his

feelings as event followed event during the next few weeks. On the 19th of July hostilities were declared. On the 24th, the Chambers were prorogued. On the 27th, the Emperor left Saint-Cloud to take command of the army. On the 2nd of August came the skirmish of Sarrebruck, where the Prince Imperial received his "Baptism of fire"—a skirmish absurdly magnified into a victory. On the 4th occurred the first real battle of the war, at Wissembourg, and the French were surprised, outnumbered, and beaten. The more important defeats of Froeschwiller and Forbach followed on the 6th, and it became clear to all that the French army, so far from carrying the war into the enemy's territory, were baffled and retreating, and that France itself was invaded. Two days afterwards the Chambers were convened once more, and Paris was declared in a state of siege. The Chambers met on the 9th, and, as may be imagined, in a state of indescribable excitement. M. Ollivier's ministry did not outlive the day. Jules Favre, speaking on behalf of the Left, proposed that the National Guard should at once be organised and armed, and that a Committee of fifteen members should be chosen, and "invested with full powers," practically to govern the country, till the return of peace. Gambetta, it need scarcely be said, supported both measures. He spoke in favour of the first on the 10th August, and in favour of the second on the 13th, declaring to the majority that the choice lay "between the salvation of the country and the salvation of a dynasty." He spoke again on the following day, complaining that the information communicated to the Chambers by the Government was miserably insufficient or misleading. He spoke again on the 16th, the 17th, the 20th, the 23rd, the 24th,

the 25th, the 27th, the 29th, and the 31st of August —not set speeches for the most part, but short interpellatory addresses, by turns passionate, indignant, persuasive, in which he seemed, if I may borrow a term from the foot-ball field, to be endeavouring to "dribble" his ideas through the angry array of his political opponents.

Do you know, gentlemen, what I think? [he cried, on one of these occasions]. It is that you are all entirely full of patriotism, but blinded; and I say so in the utmost sincerity of my heart, so that on this point at least there may be no room for difference between us. Allow me to tell you that there are different ways and means by which the salvation of the country can be secured. Well, I declare that we have already made concessions enough—[interruptions]—that we have held our peace sufficiently long—[renewed interruptions]—that a veil has too long been thrown over the events that are crowding in upon us and crushing us. I have the deepest conviction that the country is unconsciously rolling towards the abyss—[cries and protestations from the Right and Centre]. That is the truth, the whole truth!

The truth indeed! While Gambetta and his friends were urging upon the Government the necessity of arming the country, the necessity of being more frank in the disclosure of information, the necessity even of abdicating their power into the hands of a Commission of the Chambers, the war was pursuing its terrible course, and the Government itself was crumbling to pieces. On the 12th of August the Emperor resigned the chief command to Bazaine. Bazaine, after the doubtful combats of Borny, Gravelotte, and Rezonville, was beaten at Saint-Privat, and driven back into Metz. Between the Crown Prince and Paris there was only the Camp of Châlons, occupied by a half-demoralised miscellaneous force under Marshal MacMahon, who had retreated thither after the battle of Reichsoffen.

The Emperor, the Prince Imperial, and Prince Napoleon had also fled there after Gravelotte. What should they do, the Emperor and his demoralised forces? Should they leave Bazaine and his army to their fate before Metz, and retreat on Paris, the army accepting as its sole mission to defend the capital, and Louis Napoleon openly acknowledging to all men that he was utterly beaten and a miserable failure? To the Empress, to M. Rouher, to the Imperialists in Paris, the political effect of such a course seemed little short of ruin. An immediate revolution was to be feared. In an evil hour, and after many priceless moments had been wasted, they induced the Emperor and Marshal MacMahon to adopt the insane plan of marching northward, for the purpose of effecting a junction with Bazaine. The march began on the 23rd. To have had any chance of success it would have been necessary to utterly distance the Crown Prince. But how was rapidity possible with an army demoralised by reverses, ill provided, ill equipped, and led by chiefs who had neither skill to discern the movements of the enemy, nor faith in their own plans—not even stability of purpose in the wrong course they were pursuing? The end we know: how on the 2nd of September all that was left of an army of more than 124,000 men, pent up in Sedan, pell-mell, without means of escape, attack, or defence, like rats in a trap, had to lay down its arms. As Louis Napoleon drove out of the town that morning at nine o'clock, smoking his cigarette, he looked upon the outward and visible signs of almost the greatest military disaster of modern times, and can scarcely have avoided the thought that the shame of it was for all time attached to his name.

The terrible news of the capitulation of Sedan did not at once reach Paris in an authenticated form, and in all its horror. On the 3rd of September, Count de Palikao, the Minister of War, only spoke to the Corps Législatif of General MacMahon's wound, and the reports of reverses in the North-East, as "rumours having no official character." Even this, however, was so little reassuring that Jules Favre declared that the Government had become a mere phantom, and that supreme power ought to be at once vested in General Trochu, the popular general of the hour. But at four o'clock there came a telegram from the Emperor to the Empress, and before night Paris knew that one of its armies had capitulated to the enemy, that the other was practically a prisoner in Metz, and that there was literally nothing to stop the march of the Germans on the capital. A large number of the Deputies went to urge on President Schneider the desirability of holding a meeting of the Assembly that night, to which he assented. As they were coming away from his official residence, they found Gambetta, at the request as would appear of some of his colleagues, haranguing the crowd in front of the Pont de la Concorde:

Citizens [he was crying], let us show to Europe, let us show to the world, that revolution and patriotism always go hand in hand. Paris, at the present moment, can effect, not only the salvation of the country, but the salvation of the French Revolution. [Repeated cries of Vive Gambetta!] No, gentlemen, do not cry "Vive Gambetta!" Vive an individual man! At this moment no cry should proceed from a single French breast but Vive la France! . . . Gentlemen, I am about to join my colleagues, and I swear to you that ere this night has passed, or at most the *half* of to-morrow, we shall have resolved upon a course, at once energetic and worthy of the people. But we must not appear to be deliberating under pressure from

without. I beg you to withdraw. Let the approaches to the Corps Législatif be free and unencumbered.*

One of the Deputies, a member of the Right, requested the speaker to announce to the crowd that a night sitting was to be held; and with wild cries of "Vive Gambetta! Vive le Corps Législatif!" the crowd dispersed.

The Chamber met at a quarter past one, and remained sitting for twenty minutes, just long enough to allow Count de Palikao to confirm officially the news of the disaster at Sedan, and to allow Jules Favre to propose a decree declaring the Emperor deposed and the Government confided to a Commission selected by the Corps Législatif. They then adjourned till twelve o'clock on the same day, the 4th.

That 4th of September dawned in Paris, as may be supposed, with every presage of coming storm. The Government, disguise it as they might, were hopelessly demoralised. The Opposition were determined that power should pass, but, as far as possible, by orderly and legitimate means and a clear vote of the Chamber, from the hands that had proved themselves so woefully inefficient. The people were in a state of feverish anxiety, grief, and indignation. The Chamber did not really begin to sit till a quarter past one, Gambetta, "haggard with excitement," being one of the first of the members of the Left to rush in. By that time it was known throughout Paris that Lyons,

* I quote from the volume of Gambetta's speeches. The passage quoted in M. Taxile Delord's *History of the Second Empire* is notably less revolutionary in tone; ends, indeed, by deprecating any revolution. It is, of course, difficult to be quite sure of what was exactly said on such an occasion.

the second city of the Empire, had proclaimed the Republic. This did not tend to allay the prevailing agitation. An excited crowd filled the approaches of the Palais Bourbon, so far as these were not protected by soldiers and police. The galleries of the Chamber itself had, from an early hour, been thronged with journalists and their friends, and with old revolutionary deputies of former Assemblies. Shortly after the sitting had begun, Count de Palikao, the War Minister, rose and proposed that supreme power should be placed in the hands of a "Council of Government and National Defence," consisting of five members chosen by the Corps Législatif, and to be presided over by himself. It shows how men's minds had advanced in four-and-twenty hours, that such a motion—which entirely put the Emperor and Empress-regent to one side—should have been proposed by a Minister and creature of the Empire. Thiers put forward a counter proposition, leaving the appointment of the Commission entirely to the Corps Législatif—without Count de Palikao, it need scarcely be added—and allowing the future form of Government to stand over for after-consideration. The Left held to the proposal made the night before by Jules Favre, which, it may be observed, made no mention of the word "Republic." When the three resolutions had been set forth, the Chamber adjourned to its *bureaux* for the purpose of discussing them. While the deliberation was progressing, somewhat slowly, the journalists and politicians in the galleries grew impatient, left their places, roamed over the building, and emerging on to the great steps in front, waved their handkerchiefs and beckoned to the crowd to advance, crying "*Vive la République!*" The crowd, by this time increased enormously, ad-

vanced, nothing loth, neither police nor soldiers offering any effectual resistance, and invaded the galleries of the Chamber, and even the seats of the deputies. When the latter had finished their deliberations, they found the mob already in part possession of the House. Gambetta, at the request of several of his colleagues, went up to the Tribune, and, amid many interruptions, exhorted the people to be quiet, and to allow the Assembly to deliberate in an orderly manner.

What I ask of you is that you should feel, as I do the extreme gravity of the situation, and that you should not disturb us by your cries, or even by your applause. . . . There are two things to be done: the first, that the Representatives should come back and take their places on these seats, and the second, that the meeting should be held in the usual way, so that, discussion being entirely free, the decision arrived at should be of a nature to entirely satisfy the conscience of France. . . . Remember that the stranger is upon our soil. It is in the name of our country, and in the name of political liberty—two things that I, for one, shall never separate—it is in the name of these great interests, and as a representative of the French nation, which is able to make itself respected at home as well as abroad, that I adjure you to be quiet while your representatives come back to their seats.

Skilfully put, no doubt, and the speaker's personal popularity is unbounded. So the mob are hushed for the moment. But, of course, they have not come there simply to look on and listen. Soon the cries of "*La déchéance*!" and "*La République*!" begin again as loud as ever. The tumult and confusion are immense. Vainly does M. Crêmieux try to get a hearing from his "dear and good friends." His "dear and good friends" refuse to listen to a word he says. At this point Gambetta, who had left the hall for a few moments, re-enters, and goes up to the Tribune. "Citizens!" he cries with his superb voice, and the hall is hushed.

Again he exhorts the angry crowd to allow the proceedings to be conducted in an orderly manner. "No rhetoric!" bawls one voice; "No treason!" bawls another; "The Republic! the Republic!" bawl many.

In present circumstances [declares the orator], it is necessary that each one of you should help to maintain order, that each citizen in each gallery should see that his neighbour does not transgress. . . Let some be told off in each gallery to keep order during our deliberations.

At this the impressionable crowd cheers, and President Schneider reopens the proceedings. He begins with a eulogy of Gambetta, as "one of the best patriots in the country," and then proceeds, as Gambetta had done, to recommend order. But his voice has not the same persuasiveness as that of the popular favourite. Soon Gambetta obtains silence once more. But at this point, the hall is finally invaded. Schneider leaves the presidential chair, and retires hustled by the crowd. A scene of indescribable tumult follows. Thiers preaches patience in vain to those standing near him. All is misrule and confusion. Again Gambetta, with great trouble, gets back to the Tribune, and after several moments obtains a hearing; and this time, convinced apparently that there is but one practical issue possible, but one means of averting a revolution, he makes the following declaration:—

Citizens, seeing that the country is in danger, seeing that all necessary time has been given to the National Representatives to pronounce the throne vacant; seeing that we are and constitute the regular power proceeding from free Universal Suffrage, we declare that Louis Napoleon Bonaparte and his dynasty have ceased for ever to reign over France.

Thunders of applause follow this declaration. But the crowd begins clamouring again for the proclamation

of the Republic. Whereupon Jules Favre enters the hall, and he and Gambetta go to the Tribune once more. "Vive Gambetta, Vive Jules Favre!" howl the crowd, and the roll of a drum adds to the clamour and confusion. "Do you, or do you not, want civil war?" asks the latter. "No, no," answers the crowd; "no civil war, only war against the Prussians." "We must immediately constitute a provisional Government," replies Jules Favre; adding shortly after, "I conjure you, let there be no bloodshed." "The Republic! the Republic!" howls the crowd; and at last overborne, seeing, as would seem, that without some directing hand mere anarchy must ensue, Gambetta calls out, "Yes, long live the Republic! Citizens, let us go and proclaim it at the Hôtel de Ville." Jules Favre makes the same declaration.

Of that tumultuous progress from the Palais Bourbon to the Hôtel de Ville, it is difficult to obtain any very clear account. Jules Favre and M. Jules Ferry go on foot, followed by an immense crowd. Gambetta goes in a cab, followed or accompanied by his friend M. Spuller, and reaches the Hôtel de Ville first. After ringing in vain at the side door, he presents himself at the main entrance, defended by a regiment of soldiers. "Has the Republic been proclaimed at the Corps Législatif?" inquires the officer in command. "No," answers Gambetta; "they are coming to proclaim it here." The officer thereon fraternises vigorously, and embraces him; and the crowd, seeing that their entrance is unopposed, surge into the building. Gambetta soon finds himself in the private room of the Prefect of the Seine. The Prefect is not there; he is making the best of his way to the

Belgian frontier, but the Secretary-General is at his post; and it may be taken as a sign of the universal expectation of the overthrow of the Government that he receives Gambetta with the words—"I was expecting you."*

There is an enormous crowd, of course, and every sign, as is usual on such occasions, that the revolutionary scum is coming to the top. For fear lest the extreme men—the men who are afterwards to make themselves so troublesome during the siege, and to do the bloody work of the Commune—should institute a municipal government after their kind, Gambetta takes the matter in hand, seats himself in the Prefectorial chair, and proposes that Étienne Arago shall be appointed Mayor of Paris, and de Kératry Prefect of Police. His popularity is still at fever heat, and the proposal is received with acclamation. Suddenly M. Rochefort, just released from the prison of Sainte-Pélagie, and ghastly pale, enters, borne in triumph by the crowd, and wearing the red sash of 1793. There is a moment's apprehension that he may endeavour to contest the mayoralty with Arago. But, in a fit of unwonted good-sense, he refrains. Meanwhile other influential deputies have come to the Hôtel de Ville—Jules Favre, Jules Simon, Ernest Picard—and are deliberating, as well as they can for interruptions and noise, in one of the smaller halls. Gambetta joins them. The pre-eminently important question of the composition of the new Government is in debate. How at once to satisfy the people, secure efficiency, minimise the effect of angry rivalries, and set to one side the

* According to another account this happened afterwards at the Ministry of the Interior

fanatics of revolution? The members present determine that the Government shall be formed exclusively of representatives who have been elected by the city of Paris, the only exception being General Trochu, who, in virtue of his great popularity, and of his ascendency over the army, is appointed President, with full military powers. The other members are Émanuel Arago, Crémieux, Jules Favre, Jules Ferry, Gambetta, Garnier-Pagès, Glais-Bizoin, Pelletan, Picard, Rochefort, Jules Simon. At exactly a quarter to five—as Mr. Washburn notes by the great clock of the Hôtel de Ville—Gambetta appears in the embrasure of one of the windows—Jules Favre and Emanuel Arago being close behind—and standing there, bare-headed, with his hat in his hand, a dark, decisive figure, proclaims the Republic, amid vociferous enthusiasm, to the great seething crowd below.

No Ministers had yet been appointed, but Gambetta seems to have settled with himself that he was to be the new Minister of the Interior, and to have immediately gone off in a cab to take possession of his Ministry, and sent off a telegram to the Provinces announcing his appointment. At half-past ten the same night the new Government held its first meeting, again at the Hôtel de Ville, and the composition of the Ministry was formally considered. Here a competitor for Gambetta's post appeared in the person of Ernest Picard. The latter, however, was outvoted—by two votes according to Jules Favre, by one according to M. Simon; and thus, on that memorable 4th of September, Gambetta, who two years before had been a young advocate comparatively unknown, assumed functions of which the importance and responsibility,

in that dread hour of danger and disorganization, can scarcely be exaggerated.

How did he justify the trust reposed in him? The question will have to be considered in the following pages. Meanwhile there may be some advantage in looking back from this point, and trying to obtain a more exact idea of the reasons that had influenced his conduct since the beginning of the war.

At first sight it may unquestionably seem as if his policy from the middle of July to the 4th September required some excuse. As long as the war was pending, he opposed it, and was more than abundantly justified in so doing. When once it was declared, he expressed his readiness to vote the necessary supplies. And this, too, was a position at once intelligent and patriotic. But supplies are not all that a government requires for the conduct of a great war. It requires also a certain amount of consideration, a certain freedom of spirit, and the authority derived from the feeling that it speaks with the country's voice, and that its acts will be judged largely and equitably. Now this kind of support Gambetta certainly did not afford to the Government of Louis Napoleon; and some of his criticisms—as notably with regard to the withholding of information—seem the more unjustifiable, inasmuch as he did the same thing during his own dictatorship. Apart from this, however, I think his justification is to be found in the gross and palpable ineptitude with which the war was conducted from the very first. Had there been the slightest evidence that Louis Napoleon, his generals and his ministers, were really capable of war or diplomacy, that they in any way possessed the ability to guide the country out of the terrible pass into which it had

been led—then we might condemn Gambetta and his friends for their persistent hostility. But there was no such evidence. Every day made it clearer and clearer that the Government was simply imbecile. No doubt that fatal knowledge reacted on the Government itself. If the Emperor had not feared to fall to even a lower deep in the estimation of his subjects, he would never probably have thought of going to Sedan. It was one of the inherent horrors of the situation that to criticise was to weaken, and to lead to the commission of greater acts of folly. Even in the face of this risk, however, we may fairly exonerate the Opposition if they still criticised what was manifestly wrong, and were even prepared to bring about a change of Government. No doubt—to use once more Lincoln's homely but expressive simile—it is a very dangerous operation to "swop horses when you are going through the stream," but there may be circumstances in which the horse you are riding is so sorry a quadruped that the "swopping" is inevitable.

As to Gambetta's attitude on the 4th of September 1870, I think it may be as well to give his own explanation of it in his own words—the more so as that explanation is supported by all other published records. When the war had come to an end, a Commission was appointed, in no friendly spirit, to inquire into the acts of the Government of the National Defence. Gambetta appeared before this Commission on the 7th of September 1871, and spoke as follows :—

Long before the 4th of September I anticipated war. I looked forward to it with fear, because I greatly misdoubted the condition of our armaments. I had never been one of those who attack standing armies, and I was as desirous as it is possible for anyone to be to see

France resume its right position in Europe; but I entertained the gravest apprehensions for the future, because politics had taken the temper out of the Army, and the Army might thus, in the day of trial, prove a useless weapon. . . . I thought that the *plébiscite* would lead to war. . . . And I was convinced that with the declaration of war a disaster must ensue. I said at the time, "We are rolling blindly and unconsciously towards the abyss." Consequently, I was far from feeling any pleasure at the thought that the party to which I have the honour of belonging was likely to inherit a situation so terribly compromised. I greatly feared a legacy of that kind. I say this so that you may thoroughly understand the part I played on the 4th of September.

I sought in the Chamber—and we were on the point of succeeding—I sought to establish a Government, without strict designation, which might assume power on the day of defeat—for I prognosticated defeat a fortnight or three weeks before it actually occurred. The Chamber, because it had been born weak, because it lacked independence and energy, hesitated, groped, suffered itself to be led to the very edge of ruin. During four-and-twenty hours I made the very greatest efforts to induce it to proclaim the deposition of the dynasty (of the Napoleons), and the constitution of a Parliamentary Government which might take in hand the direction of affairs. This solution failed, because we had to do with men who were timid and hesitating. Then, spontaneously, the people of Paris began to move. Gentlemen, I say spontaneously, because, if you will believe me, revolutions are not made to order. Risings, splutterings of insurrection, revolts, may be brought about in that way, but nothing likely to lead to any serious result. I have seen during the Empire several pretended attempts made to effect a change of Government, but they all failed, and they failed because there was no general feeling at the back of them. On the other hand, on the 4th of September, I witnessed in Paris, and out of Paris, a really spontaneous explosion of feeling. . . . The events of the 4th of September did not, therefore, in the least, spring from any preconcerted plot, from any pre-existing arrangement. Never, perhaps, was any great revolutionary movement carried out with such unanimity, and, to put the matter quite plainly, in a manner so authoritative. Everybody accepted the inevitable. I saw on that day the principal servants of the Empire; they certainly had in their hands the wherewithal to attempt resistance; they all thought of nothing but going away and placing themselves in safety. The current was irresistible, and every section of the population of Paris contributed to swell it. The Corps Législatif, on the pretext that it had sworn an oath of loyalty to the Emperor—who had him-

self, in former times, kept his own oath in such a singular manner—the Corps Législatif having refused to take in hand the direction of affairs, and thus lost one of those opportunities which, when lost during a revolution, are lost for ever—the Corps Législatif was invaded—and with the invasion of the Chamber, the proclamation of the Republic became a certainty, and it became no less a certainty that the Republic would be loaded with a very heavy burden.

CHAPTER V.

MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR AND DICTATOR.

1870–1871.

Terrible situation confronting new Ministry—Gambetta wishes Ministry to leave Paris—He himself leaves on the 7th of October——The delegates at Tours—Position of affairs when Gambetta reaches that place—Everything to be reorganised—His energy and good spirits—Fall of Metz—French victory at Coulmiers—Inactivity of D'Aurelles de Paladine—Gambetta assumes conduct of operations—His personal courage—French driven back in all directions—News of Capitulation of Paris—Gambetta indignant—M. Jules Simon sent to Bordeaux to bring him to reason—He resigns on the 6th of February 1871—Grandeur of his attitude during the war.

It was remarked, by an unfriendly observer, that the popular leaders bore on their faces no look of triumph as they proceeded from the Corps Législatif to the Hôtel de Ville; and M. Jules Simon, accepting the statement, says that there was no feeling of triumph in their hearts as they thought of the country's ruin, and the immense difficulty of the task that had devolved upon them.

Seldom indeed can a body of responsible statesmen have met under sadder auspices than the members of the Government of National Defence, who—while the city was still ringing with enthusiasm over the fall of

the Empire, and the proclamation of the Republic—assembled for their first council-meeting at half-past ten on the night of the 4th of September 1870. M. Jules Simon has given an account of their deliberations, and the lamentable series of subjects that came under review. The first thing to be done was, naturally, to organise the *personnel* of the new Government;—and now it was that Gambetta was confirmed in his appointment as Minister of the Interior. Then came a full inquiry into "the situation." This was, to use M. Simon's expression, "heart-rending." Of the two armies of France, one had just laid down its arms. The other, almost equally unserviceable, was imprisoned in Metz. The only remaining force consisted of General Vinoy's army corps, numbering from 15,000 to 20,000 men, a force demoralised by defeat, and that might be cut off by the enemy before it could reach Paris. No doubt an almost universal levy of the population had been ordered. But what can raw untrained civilians do, without generals, without officers, without non-commissioned officers? How is drill possible under such conditions, let alone campaigning? When Marshal Ney sent to ask for reinforcements as the day of Waterloo was wearing to a close, it is said that Napoleon cried impatiently, "Where does he suppose they are to come from? Does he think I can make them?" Some such thought must have crossed the minds of the members of the Government as they remembered the almost impossibility of "improvising" infantry, and the long months of training required to make a decent cavalry soldier or artilleryman.

And assuming that the men could be raised and put into line, how could they be armed, fed, clothed? By what M. Jules Simon justly calls "an inconceivable

want of foresight," the great stores of warlike material had been concentrated at Metz and Strasburg, and were consequently not accessible. Guns were wanting, cannons were wanting, all was wanting. Even before the war there had been a manifest insufficiency of supplies. And now to that insufficiency was to be added the enormous waste of defeat.

Such was the military situation; and the enemy, justly confident in their leadership and numbers, and flushed by victory, were within a few days' march of Paris.

Could the new Government at any rate, in view of dangers so imminent and appalling, count upon the full support of the country, and especially of Paris? It was one of the fatalities of the position that they represented only a party, at a time when France stood in need of the utmost devotion of all her sons. Still, as regarded the defeated Imperialists, the utmost that might be feared was a certain sullenness and indisposition to accept the orders of Republican rulers. From that quarter no violent subversive opposition was to be anticipated. But this was far from being the case as regarded the extreme section of the Republican Party itself. Here there existed, as the events of the day had shown conclusively enough, and after-events were to show very terribly, a real and pressing danger. Had not Gambetta himself, during the tumultuous meeting in the afternoon, incurred much odium by objecting to accept Félix Pyat, one of the stormy petrels of Revolution, as a member of the Government? Had not Gambetta's old client, Delescluse, shaken off the dust from his feet on leaving the council-room, declaring that there was "nothing to be done with such men"? This party, the party of sub-

version and disorder, was to be restrained by no consideration of reason or patriotism. Within sound of the German guns, it was to attempt the fortunately abortive revolt of the 31st of October; with the German armies still encamped round her walls, it was to deluge Paris with blood, and send the flame of her buildings flaring to the sky.

Such, to put the matter briefly, was the terrible outlook before the council which sat from half-past ten to three on the night of the 4th of September: without, the advancing Germans; within, no adequate means of resistance, and the mutterings of imminent revolution. Gambetta has told us, in the speech from which I have already quoted, that, according to his judgment, the Government should, almost from the first, have regarded Paris simply as a besieged city, and removed to some provincial town, there to organise the forces of the country. In his view, which is at least plausible, from the moment that Paris was cut off from the rest of France, it ceased to be a desirable seat of Government. M. Jules Simon, on the other hand, urges the disastrous effects of leaving Paris to itself at such a crisis, and holds still, even after the event, that the course adopted was the right one. A difficult question truly. Either of the roads branching forward was fraught with peril. Weighing the arguments, however, as well as one can, I confess it seems to me that in this matter Gambetta was right, and that the danger of revolution in Paris was less than the danger of a divided Government, and of alienating the provinces. The young statesman himself, as we shall presently see, was to minimise these latter dangers by his energy and force of character. They were very real notwithstanding.

Meanwhile, what between military preparations and

internal reorganisation, the new Government, as may be supposed, had its hands more than full; and day by day the Germans were drawing nearer, nearer, and the lines of investment forming closer and closer round the doomed city. That Gambetta laboured terribly in the important post which he occupied, is clear. French administration is a complicated machine, and with the change of Government a change of *personnel* in a great many offices of State—prefects, sub-prefects, and the like—had become imperative. The objects of his solicitude were at this time endless. But apart from his decrees and proclamations, we get little real touch of him between the 4th of September and the 7th of October, when he left Paris. One glimpse of him, indeed, we obtain through the eyes of M. Rochefort, who assured M. d'Idevile that he used to come to the meetings of the Government with a dirty shirt and dirty hands, and looking altogether slovenly and disreputable. But as M. Rochefort coupled this description with a remark to the effect that Gambetta was "a stranger, an enemy to the French race," I think we may venture to doubt whether the Minister of the Interior was really so very careless as to the whiteness of his linen.

Though the Government had refused to leave Paris, yet, from an early date, it had become obvious that the provinces could not be left without some recognised authority. On the 12th of September M. Crémieux was delegated to represent the Central Government at Tours, and on the 16th of September M. Glais-Bizoin and Admiral Fourichon were appointed to assist him—the latter in the enormously difficult post of Vice-Minister of War. Nor did they leave Paris for their new duties one whit too soon. On the

19th the Germans arrived in force before the capital, and on the 21st the investment was completed.

Before a fortnight had passed, the dangers inseparable from a dual Government—dangers which Gambetta had foreseen—came to be urgent. One of the first thoughts of the new ministers after the 4th of September had been to arrange for the holding of general elections throughout such portions of the country as were not in the power of the Germans. But other more pressing objects of solicitude, and almost insuperable practical difficulties, had adjourned the realisation of this purpose to an indefinite future. By the 1st of October, however, Gambetta was in a position to inform his colleagues that the Tours delegation had taken the matter into their own hands, and issued a decree appointing a General Election for the 15th. The news excited the greatest consternation among the Ministers. In an abstract sort of way, they no doubt regarded Universal Suffrage as representing the highest ideal of human wisdom. But even they, in the first dawn-flush of a recovered Republic, might well hesitate, at such a moment, to toss the destinies of the country into the ballot-box and trust blindly to the result. That the Tours delegation had taken a different view is comprehensible enough. M. Crémieux was a staunch Republican, a distinguished advocate, and a respectable politician—but he was no more. M. Glais-Bizoin was not even so much. His chief title to distinction lay in his readiness as an obstructive debater. Vice-Admiral Fourichon abjured all character as a politician, and regarded his functions as those of an administrator only. Not one of the three possessed either such force of character and intellect, or such

superiority of position and past services, as would have enabled him to bend France to his will, and obtain, if not without grudging, yet at least without resistance, the enormous sacrifices of blood and treasure inseparable from a continuance of the war. The Government—a purely Parisian Government, be it remembered — was shut up in Paris, and reduced to communication with the rest of the world by means of pigeons and balloons. Well might the provinces, by no means wholly Republican, contest an authority so tainted in its source, as it would seem to them, and so remote. In view of the immense difficulties by which the Tours delegation was surrounded — difficulties which included the possibility of a dismemberment of France—there is, I repeat, small room for wonder that its members sought to strengthen their failing authority by an appeal to the country at large.

The crisis was imminent. The Government in Paris were determined not to yield, and were convinced that a General Election, under existing conditions, was probably the first step to a degrading peace. They decided, therefore, at once to annul the decree convoking a new legislative body, and to send a fresh delegate to Tours. Who should that delegate be? Some of the Ministers at the meeting of the 1st of October proposed Gambetta—others Jules Favre. Both refused, Gambetta holding that, as one of the youngest, it was his duty to remain at what he considered the post of danger—nearest the enemy. The question was re-discussed on the 3rd, and decided by a vote of all present, when the choice fell on Gambetta, who thereupon accepted the difficult office to which he was called. The most important points in his instructions were that, in case of difference of opinion among

his colleagues at Tours, he should have a "preponderant voice," that he should have "full powers for the recruiting, assembling and armament of all the national forces," but that he had no mission to treat with the enemy.

Of the spirit in which the young man accepted his mission, Jules Favre has spoken thus:—

He was much moved, and only consented with extreme repugnance to leave Paris. He was at that moment far from desiring the office of Dictator. Neither was he under any illusion as to the almost insurmountable difficulties that lay before us. But he did not despair of triumphing over them. He had not in any way sought to obtain the authority with which he was about to be invested, and I am quite sure that he did not foresee how that authority would tend to become more absolute. But he had the noble and holy ambition of saving his country; and the very strength of his purpose made him believe that he had it in him to succeed. "I shall come back with an army," he said to me, very confidently, "and if the glory of delivering Paris should be mine, Fate will have satisfied my utmost wish."

To leave Paris at that time could be done in one way only, and that was by balloon. Gambetta, when once his departure had become a settled thing, displayed the utmost eagerness to be gone. But the weather on the 6th of October proved to be hazy and unpropitious, and it was not till the following day, the 7th, at eleven o'clock in the morning, that a start could be effected. A large crowd had assembled to witness the proceedings, and it was to a great shout of "*Vive la République! Vive Gambetta!*" that the balloon containing the young Dictator, and his friend and secretary M. Spuller, rose slowly towards the north-west. When they got beyond the line of the French forts towards Saint-Denis, they became a mark for the rifles and cannon of the enemy, fortunately without result. Then the balloon, which seems to have behaved badly,

manifested a tendency to descend in too close proximity to the Germans, and was shot at again, and almost hit; and then, soon afterwards, another ineffectual volley was discharged at it. Meanwhile the travellers, if we are to credit a lively correspondent of the *Daily News*, were moralising on things in general, M. Spuller "enjoying the sensation of being carried along as helplessly as if he were a log of wood floating down a river"; while, as to Gambetta, his

impressions were entirely different. He was almost, to use his own language, "stunned with the overpowering idea of Nature's force and man's weakness." He felt, to his great astonishment, that he had no sense of the abyss. The world seemed to recede from the balloon. Instead of being dazzled with the vast horizon which was opened to his gaze, he was stupefied at the total obliteration of the picturesque in the boundless expanse beneath him. The earth had the appearance of a badly designed carpet, or rather a carpet in which the different coloured wools had been woven entirely by chance. Light and vastness were deprived of the value which shade and proportion give them.

Solacing themselves as best they could with such reflections while the German bullets went whistling by, the travellers at last, towards three o'clock, effected a safe descent into some trees near Mondidier, and proceeded thence, by carriage, after incurring the usual suspicion of being Prussian spies, to Amiens—where they slept. On the following day they passed through Rouen, which Gambetta did his best to cheer by a patriotic speech, and finally reached their destination at Tours by mid-day on Sunday, the 9th of October.

It was high time, indeed, that Gambetta should appear upon the scene. Crémieux was an old man of seventy-four, an able advocate and a Jew, one of the respectabilities of the Republican party, but no more.

Glais-Bizoin was seventy, "a little old man very carelessly and slovenly dressed"—so he is described by an eye-witness—and chiefly remarkable for his constant interruptions in the late Chamber. Admiral Fourichon was sixty-one, and had, moreover, quarrelled with his two colleagues on the 5th of October, and resigned his functions. Obviously not a triumvirate calculated to rouse popular enthusiasm. Nothing can be clearer than that their senile efforts, respectable enough, no doubt, so far as intentions went, were failing to keep alive the national cause, and even to prevent the country from falling to pieces. But with Gambetta's advent an immense change took place. He breathed as it were with the breath of life over the dry bones of the country's despair; and, in the language of Ezekiel, which one may use here, I think, without irreverence, "the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army."

The outlook on the 9th of October, when the young statesman reached Tours, was indeed terrible. Several of the great towns, Lyons in chief, were repudiating the authority of the central Government. Several of the Southern departments were forming a confederacy on their own account. In very many places the hostile political factions, Republicans of all shades, Bonapartists, Royalists, Clericals, could scarcely be restrained from flying at one another. The enemy, numbering from 700,000 to 800,000 men, all excellent troops and perfectly equipped, were firmly established on French soil, and eating out the life of the land; while, to oppose them, apart from the imprisoned garrison of Metz, and the untrained imprisoned garrison of Paris, there were but 40,000 regular troops, about as many

mobilised National Guards, and 5,000 or 6,000 cavalry—all in the most doubtful condition.

Taking the army alone—and the other administrative services were in pretty nearly the same state—everything had to be created anew: infantry, cavalry, artillery, engineers, commissariat, ordnance and medical departments. Nor had the young Minister at his disposal a fully trained body of officials, possessing the necessary knowledge of an army's requirements. The central government were so full of the idea that Paris was the key to the whole position, that they had only sent off a quarter of the staff of the various Government offices to Tours, and no Government archives. Thus, to take two instances out of many, the new administrators were absolutely without information as to the character and antecedents of the various officers and non-commissioned officers presenting themselves for employment, and, in the midst of a great war, they had no maps. Everywhere, on all sides, there was chaos, confusion, and dismay.

But Gambetta never lost heart. On the 9th of October, the very day of his arrival at Tours, he issued two proclamations—one to the "citizens of the departments," telling how Paris had prepared to meet the enemy, and exhorting them to set aside all differences, and think only of the deliverance of the country; and the other to the "army," containing a stirring appeal to their patriotism, and especially to their respect for discipline. And having issued these, as a kind of trumpet blast summoning France and her sons to battle, he immediately set to work, issuing decree on decree for the organisation of the new forces, seeing to the purchase of the necessary munitions, sending

M. Clément Laurier to London to raise a loan, and so obtain the necessary "sinews of war," arranging plans of campaign with the generals, going from place to place — here there and everywhere — ordering, exhorting, cajoling—making himself all things to all men—and always, even in the face of defeat and disaster, maintaining a cheerful confidence and undaunted courage. Here at last, as the country felt, was a *man*, and all hearts went out to him at once.

The novelty of the young Minister's voyage through the air [says one* who occupied the post of secretary to a provincial Prefect at this time], the strangeness of the unexpected fall of a "Providential" man just when it was being felt that MM. Crémieux and Glais-Bizoin were infinitely below the task that had been assigned to them, caused wild enthusiasm everywhere. For the first time the indifferent provincials started out of their torpor, and the young recruits walked about the streets singing "Gambetta" to the popular air of the *Lampions*. . . M. Gambetta's presence was immediately felt everywhere, at Guéret as at other places, and from that moment our duties became more military than civil. The presence of a man who seemed utterly indifferent to the means he employed to force the country to defend itself intimidated for a while the *Réactionnaires*. The energetic decree for the mobilisation of all single men from twenty-one to forty showed that he meant to work with a will.

Here was no fumbling any more, and the country from end to end quivered to the impulse of the young Dictator's energy.

But to go back to the story of the campaign. On the 10th of October, the very day after Gambetta's arrival at Tours, the French forces, laboriously collected together at Orleans, under de La Motterouge, were defeated by Van der Tann and driven southwards, Tours itself not being regarded as safe from attack.

* See *Six Months of Prefecture under Gambetta*, by C. B., in *Frazer's Magazine* for November 1872. The initials are fairly transparent.

Rightly or wrongly—for there has been a good deal of difference on this point — Gambetta immediately superseded de La Motterouge, and appointed d'Aurelles de Paladine to take his place. The latter established himself in the entrenched camp of Salibris, south of Orleans, and spent the next few days in drilling and organising his forces. On the 24th a council of war was held, at which assisted M. de Freycinet, a young engineer, now heard of for the first time, and just appointed by Gambetta as a kind of sub War Minister. A forward movement on Paris was determined upon. Before it could be executed news came of the capitulation of Metz; and whether for this reason, or because he feared to take the field with his raw untrained levies, d'Aurelles hung back. The fall of Metz at this particular juncture was a terrible blow to the French cause. It at once set 200,000 Germans free to march across the country, cover the force besieging Paris, and operate against the troops which Gambetta was collecting for the relief of the place. We have all heard of the "Austerlitz look" that used to come into Pitt's face. There would have been no room for wonder if a "Metz look" had come into Gambetta's face after this time, so terribly must that discreditable capitulation have fallen like a bombshell into the midst of his plans, shattering and scattering them. But he never bated jot of heart or hope. He at once issued a strong proclamation to the country, branding, in terms which history has not refused to endorse, the treachery of Bazaine, and exhorting all Frenchmen to meet the new disaster with fortitude and courage. Evidently, if Paris was to be effectually relieved, it would be necessary to use despatch, so as

to forestall the Germans marching from Metz under Prince Frederick Charles. On the 7th of November, d'Aurelles advanced northwards, and on the 9th attacked Van der Tann at Coulmiers, when, O joy of joys! the Germans were defeated. A ray of victory —the first since the beginning of the war—broke on the French arms. Orleans was evacuated. Van der Tann retreated northwards. The country seemed to breathe once more.

D'Aurelles, after his victory, did nothing, to the extreme surprise of the Germans, who naturally expected to be pursued. Gambetta, immediately on receiving the news of the battle, hastened to the head-quarters of the army with M. de Freycinet, and was urgent that the General should march on Paris. What though his troops were raw and untrained—which was the reason urged for his inactivity—yet they were flushed with their success, and convinced by the best of all arguments that the enemy were not invincible. Every day the situation of Paris must get worse. Prince Frederick Charles's forces had not yet had time to come from Metz. Surely now, if ever, was the time to strike a decisive blow and see whether the German lines could not be pierced. All excellent arguments, and since ratified as such by professional military critics.* But d'Aurelles was immovable. So far from going forward, he wished to go back—to return to his quarters at Salibris.† And thus a golden opportunity, which a little fortunate boldness, or even say rashness, might have turned to excellent advan-

* See *Guerre Franco-Allemande, Résumé et Commentaires de l'ouvrage du grand État-Major Prussien*, par Félix Bonnat, Paris 1878.

† D'Aurelles de Paladine contradicts M. de Freycinet on this point. It is at least clear that he refused to advance.

tage, was lost. Gambetta had to be satisfied, grievously against his will, with a middle course, and the army entrenched itself at Orleans.

While they were remaining there, comparatively inactive notwithstanding the most pressing remonstrances, Gambetta went to Le Mans to help General Jaurès to organise the defences of the West, as he had been to Besançon, a month before, to organise the defences of the East. Then, as D'Aurelles still refused to do anything, General de Pallières was ordered forward, and the active conduct of operations passed for a short space into the hands of Gambetta and his subordinate, M. de Freycinet. For this Gambetta has been greatly blamed. But, in the country's sore extremity, it is difficult to see what other course was open to him. He could not well *dismiss* d'Aurelles, who had just won the first and only victory on the French side since the beginning of the war. And yet Paris was advancing day by day to starvation point; and though the General's mistrust of the quality of his troops was no doubt justified, yet he clearly did not appreciate that even the chance of defeat was better than doing nothing.* Then occurred, on the 28th of November, the battle of Beaune-la-Rolande, in which the French attacked the Germans without success; and on the 30th of November, Gambetta, having received a belated dispatch announcing a grand sortie from Paris, gave definite orders to d'Aurelles to advance.

The result was disastrous. D'Aurelles seems to have displayed no generalship in the conduct of the

* M. Bonnat seems to hold—see vol. ii., p. 165 of his book—that Gambetta's plan of advance was better than that adopted by the General.

operations, and the superior discipline and training of the Germans told at all points heavily. After some four days of confused fighting round Orleans, the French, greatly disorganised, evacuated the place on the night of the 4th of December, under a threat of bombardment, and retreated southwards.

Among the many rancorous accusations which party spirit has accumulated against Gambetta, that of personal cowardice has not been spared. He has been represented as keeping well out of harm's way in the Prefecture of Tours, while the country was marching to battle and death. Such a charge would, in any case, be obviously absurd. The effective head of a government, during a great war, is clearly doing his duty to better purpose in the council chamber than on the field of battle. But, apart from this, it is in no sense true that Gambetta shrank personally from danger. On the 4th of December, at a little past two in the afternoon, he started from Tours for Orleans, for the purpose of seeing what help could be afforded to the defeated d'Aurelles. Orleans he never reached. It was too late. But we have the evidence of an eye-witness, who is by no means a partizan, to the effect that the journey was not one of security and pleasure.

As chance would have it [says the Marquis de Castellane] I was on guard at the station of Beaugency on the 4th of December 1870. At nightfall I saw the locomotive come in that brought the young Dictator. It had all the appearance of a stag half disembowelled by the hounds and flying affrighted. It was literally riddled by the German bullets. Gambetta had remained at his post to the last minute, for the purpose of organizing the rescue of the remnant of the army of Orleans.

Though that army had been defeated, yet the Ger-

mans were greatly mistaken if they thought they had nothing to do but advance and take possession. On the 8th, 9th, and 10th of December they met with an obstinate resistance from General Chanzy, on whom had devolved the command of the forces to the west of Orleans; and though the French were finally unable to maintain their position, and retreated on Le Mans, yet they did so in fair order and without dishonour. To the east of Orleans the French forces also still held the field under Bourbaki. Nevertheless, it was clear that, with the Germans in such close proximity, Tours was no longer a fit place for the seat of government, and on the 8th it was transferred to Bordeaux. Gambetta, however, did not immediately proceed southwards, for, on the 9th, we find him at the head-quarters of Chanzy's army, and on the 10th he is at Blois, preventing the inhabitants from repairing the bridge over the Loire under a threat of bombardment from the enemy in case of refusal. Thence he proceeds to Bourbaki's head-quarters at Bourges. And, on his way between the two head-quarters, we catch a glimpse of him again.

M. Gambetta passed at Guéret shortly after on his way to Bourges [says the "C. B." from whom I have already quoted]. The special train stopped, and we conversed for a few moments by the dim light of the carriage lamp. M. Gambetta was then in the most critical period of his dictatorship; the want of any substantial help from those around him, save from M. Clément Laurier, and his private secretary, M. Spuller, left the whole burden of the situation on his shoulders; he ran hither and thither on all sides of France, from Bordeaux to Lille, from Lille to Lyons, and displayed wonderful activity. Contrary to my expectation, I found him hearty and well. "We must somehow drive out these Prussians . . . and I answer for it that we shall drive them out," he exclaimed, in a loud cheery voice. Despite of reverses—and we were right in the midst of the worst—the young statesman was overflowing with confidence, which contrasted painfully with the cold apathy I was used to.

Is it not a bright picture? What superb vitality and fortitude! If the glimpse we had of him on his battered engine showed that he possessed physical courage, the glimpse we get here shows that he possessed that rarer kind of courage which stands unmoved under disappointment and defeat. Surely if ever the heart of a country can be said to have beaten in the breast of one of its sons, then the heart of France beat in the breast of Gambetta during these terrible weeks. No doubt his confidence rested, in many respects, on an insufficient foundation. No doubt, in the exuberance of his enthusiasm, with his brain all full of the traditions of 1792 and of the mighty achievements of the volunteers of the first Republic, he overrated the power of untrained levies in modern warfare, and often miscalculated what he had a right to expect from them. But the time was assuredly not one for nice calculations of less and more. It was a time when daring alone had any chance of success, when the best statesman was he who did not know he was beaten.

And he had need of all his fortitude, for worse days yet were in store. His object in going to Bourges was to organise a plan of campaign with Bourbaki, and the plan on which they finally settled was an advance to the eastward, so as to endeavour to cut off the invading force from Germany. It was a good plan enough in itself, but, like so many other excellent plans made during the war, it required, in order to be successful, quickness of movement, and regularity in the forwarding of supplies—especially as the season was most rigorous—and these good things, with an army so raw and insufficiently organised, were unattainable. The advance, commenced on the 23rd of

December, was continued, with varying success, till the French, beaten at Héricourt after three days' hard fighting, on the 15th, 16th, and 17th of January, were forced back and back, a huddled, starved, half frozen, disintegrated, demoralised mass, over the Swiss frontier, where they finally laid down their arms. Bourbaki did not see the bitter end of that disastrous retreat—a retreat which, for utter human misery and suffering, has been compared to the melting of Napoleon's Grand Army into the interminable snows of Russia. He attempted suicide on the 20th of January.

Meanwhile, the French had not been inactive in other directions. To the north General Faidherbe had advanced on Amiens, had been attacked on the 23rd of December at Pont Noyelles by General Manteuffel, had attacked the Germans in turn at Bapaume on the 3rd of January, and with fairly equal success, and had then been beaten on the 19th of January before Saint Quentin in attempting to march on Paris. To the west, as we have seen, General Chanzy still held the field at Le Mans, where he was trying to reorganise his troops, and even meditating another forward movement, while disputing, day after day, the advance of the Germans. On the 10th of January the latter reached his positions; and then, during the next few days, there was confused fighting round Le Mans, with the usual, and in one sense, perhaps, inevitable result, that the French forces, consisting practically of untrained civilians, were hopelessly beaten, and fled, for the most part a demoralised rabble, through the winter snows.

Thus, in whatever direction Gambetta looked, whether east, north, or west, there was defeat and

disaster; and now a yet more terrible blow, as he considered it, was about to fall. On the 27th of January news reached him, indirectly, and apparently through the English papers, that the Government in Paris were treating for a capitulation, and even for a peace. He immediately fulminated against that Government an eloquent despatch, bitterly animadverting on the inefficiency of the efforts made to break through the German lines, urging the imperative necessity of renewed and stronger efforts, and protesting in advance against any capitulation that should do more than bind Paris itself. "Everything that you would do, outside of what relates purely to the interests of Paris, without our consent and ratification, would be null and of none effect." As to the future, he urged Jules Favre—towards whom, personally, his tone was one of almost pathetic tenderness—to join the Bordeaux delegation; he expressed himself in favour of a general election, so far as it might be feasible, but with a rigorous exclusion of the servants of the Empire; and he declared his unalterable conviction that the war ought to be continued, even after Paris had fallen, and that the resources of the country were by no means exhausted. Two days afterwards his worst apprehensions were confirmed. On the morning of the 29th came a laconic telegram from Jules Favre, announcing that an armistice of twenty-one days had been concluded with Prince Bismarck, that a general election was to be held on the 8th of February, a National Assembly to meet on the 15th, for the purpose of deciding the question of peace or war, and that a member of the Government was starting for Bordeaux. Here, at yet another crucial point, was a terrible exemplification of the fatal mistake committed by the Govern-

ment when it shut itself in the capital. Gambetta waited, in feverish anxiety, through that day, and the morning of the next, for further news. None came. At half-past two he telegraphed to Jules Favre, complaining of the ignorance in which he was being kept. The telegram was intercepted, and answered on the 31st by Prince Bismarck. Meanwhile, on the 30th and 31st of January, he was assuring the prefects throughout France that his policy of resistance remained unaltered; and on the latter day he issued a stirring proclamation to the French people, speaking of "the culpable levity" with which the armistice had been concluded, and exhorting them all, from the highest to the lowest, to uphold the honour of the country with their votes and their arms. At the same time he was issuing a decree declaring that anyone who had served the Empire in certain capacities was ineligible as a representative at the coming Assembly.

These measures, either known or foreseen, excited, as may be supposed, the very gravest apprehensions in the breasts of the members of the Paris Government. They had lost, for the most part, all hope in the continuance of the war, and had no intention of abdicating in favour of the fiery young Dictator; while the decree declaring that the Imperialists were ineligible as national representatives was, as Prince Bismarck immediately took occasion to remind Gambetta rather sharply, contrary to the terms of the Convention, which stipulated that the Assembly must be "freely elected." M. Jules Simon was forthwith appointed, with full powers, to bear to Bordeaux the intimation of the wishes of the Government, and started from Paris on the morning of the 31st. He has himself

described the difficulties of his mission—how, on reaching Bordeaux on the afternoon of the 2nd of February, he went straight to the Prefecture, and interviewed the Delegates in the room of M. Crémieux; how they assailed him with the most bitter reproaches, and even insults; but how he refused to enter into any general discussion, and stuck to his one point that the decree against the Imperialists must be annulled. All four, Gambetta, Crémieux, Glais-Bizoin, even Fourichon, refused. What was to be done next? At this point the Mayor and Municipal Councillors entered. They declared that they would obey the Delegates, not the Government in Paris. M. Simon seemed powerless. "The town," he says, "was like a camp; Gambetta's rule was absolute." Naturally the new-comer was averse to an appeal to the army, and moreover it was doubtful how far the army would follow him. After consulting with Thiers, who happened to be at Bordeaux, he sent off a sure messenger to Paris to explain the situation, and bring up a further contingent of Ministers to outvote the Delegates. Meanwhile, on the 2nd, Prince Bismarck telegraphed to Gambetta, protesting against the latter's decree as an act of "arbitrary oppression," and as being contrary to the Convention. This was, of course, a trump card for Gambetta, who posted a copy of the telegram on all the walls, with an address to the "Citizens," calling attention to the Prussian Minister's "insolent claim" to interfere in the constitution of a French Assembly. M. Simon's position now became one of extreme difficulty. He went straight—this was on the 3rd—to the Delegates, and read them the order of the Government, giving him full powers in case of any difference of opinion, an order which he had determined only to

use under the pressure of extreme necessity; and then got a friendly journal to publish a decree annulling the obnoxious decree of the Delegates. The Delegates immediately suppressed M. Simon's decree, and Gambetta and Crémieux were for having M. Simon himself arrested. Finally, on the 6th, at nine o'clock in the morning, three more members of the Government —Garnier-Pagès, Emmanuel Arago, and Pelletan— arrived in Bordeaux for the purpose of supporting M. Simon; and, except at the risk of civil war and the utter paralysis of all Government, there was clearly nothing before the Delegates but submission. Gambetta, bitterly as he felt the ruin of all his hopes, was wise enough, and patriotic enough, not to affront that terrible contingency. On the same day, the 6th of February, he resigned his post as Minister of the Interior and of War.*

Thus, somewhat sadly as I think, came to an end Gambetta's dictatorship of four months. Unquestionably he was wrong in the ultimate point of debate between himself and the Paris Government. Apart altogether from the terms of the convention with Prince Bismarck, there was no reason in February, 1871, for any apprehension lest the country should return Imperialist representatives. As the event showed conclusively, Imperialism was, for the time at least, an object of national loathing. The faults it had committed were too recent, and the penalty of them too overwhelming. Gambetta in all this discussion was frightening himself at a shadow. Nor, in the far greater question that

* M. Simon says Gambetta did not assist at the meeting of the old and new Delegates held on the 6th. But it is difficult to reconcile this with the terms of the letter in which the latter announced his resignation.

lay behind his insistence on the exclusion of the Imperialists, can it be said that he was right either. With the fall of Paris, all possibility that the French would retrieve their fortunes by arms had departed. Even before that event they had shown themselves unable to cope with the invading army. To the east Bourbaki's forces were a mere rabble, the refluent spent spray of an army; to the west and north Chanzy and Faidherbe were in scarcely better case; Garibaldi's small force was alone really available for any immediate purpose. And now that Paris had fallen, the besieging forces would be utilised to reinforce the Germans already overrunning the country, and the demoralised French troops would be beaten all the more surely in detail. It was a hopeless position.

That Gambetta did not see it so detracts, however, in no wise from the value of the services he had rendered to his country up to this date. There were many at the time—and one regrets to remember how generally that abject position was taken up by our own press—there were those at the time who considered that France ought to have surrendered unconditionally after the disaster at Sedan. Her armies had been beaten, the fortune of war had proved adverse. Let her give up her provinces, suffer her sons to be incorporated into a nationality which they hated, and accept without further ado her shame and humiliation. That judgment has long been reversed. It is now all but universally acknowledged that in determining to continue the war, at whatever odds, France acted in the spirit of her splendid past, and, through reverses and disaster, kept her pride of place among the nations unforfeited. A great people does not live by bread alone. It lives, among other things, by its

fortitude under trial, its stern reluctance to accept defeat, its intense and passionate feeling of unity. And because Gambetta never faltered in this conviction through one of his country's darkest hours, therefore his name will remain, as I think, a name of honour to all time in his country's annals, and be as a light in the dark hours that may come hereafter.

Nor, be it remembered, was he a mere eloquent voice summoning France to battle. The amount of hard administrative work which he performed during the four months of his dictatorship was simply marvellous. No doubt his efforts were unsuccessful. The armies he raised so toilfully proved powerless to hold the field against the Germans. One by one his plans for the relief of Paris proved abortive and failed. But in judging of these failures it is right to bear in mind with what materials he had to work, and against what difficulties. Everything, as I have already said, had to be created anew in those improvised armies of his, and created, with wholly insufficient time, in the face of the enemy, and amid the demoralising influences of defeat. The very nature of the strategical problem he had to solve—the relief of Paris—compelled him constantly to take the offensive prematurely with troops that scarcely knew their drill; nor, without detracting in any way from the merit of Chanzy and Faidherbe, or even of d'Aurelles de Paladine, can it be said that he was seconded by a commander of genius, or even of commanding ability. Of course he made mistakes, and too habitually expected the impossible. But his plans were not all ill-laid; they were plans that might, on more than one occasion, have proved successful save for some untoward circumstance, such, for instance, as the fall of Metz. On all these points we may freely

accept the German verdict. Baron Colmar von der Goltz,* together with much criticism of detail, has nothing but admiration for the "giant's work which Gambetta accomplished in less time than any previous organiser of armies"; for the "great skill" and economy of his "financial administration"; for the "remarkable penetration" with which he "perceived the great lines of truth" in the military operations, and seized upon "the vulnerable points" in the position "of his adversaries." And Baron von der Goltz concludes, "If ever, which God forbid, our country should undergo such a defeat as the French suffered at Sedan, I trust most fervently that there may arise among us a man like Gambetta to kindle in every heart a desire of resistance to the last bitter end."

A *politique de fou furieux,* the "policy of a raging madman"—thus Thiers is said to have described Gambetta's policy at the time. But the calmer judgment of men has not, so far, ratified that verdict, nor, I venture to think, will history adopt it as her "last word." Rather will history say that his policy was the highest policy, because it was a policy of national self-respect, and that if France, even after six terrible months of disaster, could still lift up her head among the nations and echo the cry attributed to her defeated king, "*Tout est perdu fors l'honneur,*" that not ignoble result was mainly due to Gambetta.

* *Gambetta und Seine Armeen.*

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CHAPTER VI.

FROM THE END OF THE WAR TO THE FALL OF THIERS.

1870–1873.

Elections—Gambetta elected by nine constituencies—Treaty of Peace voted—Gambetta resigns and goes to St. Sebastian—Returns to public life—Position of parties—Thiers—*Pacte de Bordeaux*—Speech of Gambetta—His attitude in the Chambers—Starts the *République Française*—The "Bagman of the Republic"—He excites the ire of the majority—Changarnier—Gambetta shows great qualities of statesmanship—Majority determine to overthrow Thiers—The Barodet election—Mistake made by Gambetta — Thiers overthrown — Marshal MacMahon elected President.

THE elections took place throughout France on the 8th of February, and on the 12th the first meeting of the Assembly was held at Bordeaux. Of the total number of 768 deputies, some 30 were Imperialists, some 30 more had no very definite political creed, some 250 were declared Republicans, and the remainder —that is to say, the majority—were Monarchists of various shades of Orleanism or Legitimacy. And this result may be easily explained. The Empire, notwithstanding the apprehensions of Gambetta, was, for the nonce, an object of loathing. The Republic was in

many ways identified with the policy of continuing a war, and the country felt rightly that that policy had had its day. But in voting for monarchical candidates the electors knew they were voting for peace; and, moreover, those candidates were, for the most part, men of position and influence in their own districts. Gambetta himself was elected by no less than nine departments, which is a significant fact. At Paris he was third on the list, coming after Louis Blanc and Victor Hugo, with 202,399 votes. From among these constituencies he chose to sit for the department of the *Bas Rhin*, where Strasburg was situate—Strasburg that had played its part so honourably throughout the war, and was so soon to pass into alien hands.

It is no part of my duty to tell the story of the Assembly at Bordeaux. We all know how, on the 13th of February, the Government of National Defence, speaking through the mouth of Jules Favre, resigned its authority to the Assembly; how, on the 16th, the Assembly elected M. Grévy as its president; how, on the 17th, Thiers was chosen, almost unanimously, as Chief of the Executive Government, the ultimate polity of France being left for after consideration; how, on the 19th, he and Jules Favre started from Bordeaux to negotiate the conditions of peace with Prince Bismarck. We know, too, what those conditions were: the crushing money indemnity, and the provinces which Germany insisted—whether wisely or not time has yet to show—on tearing out of France's side. No wonder that the Assembly sat silent and in consternation as they listened to the reading of the proposed treaty, on the 28th February. It was discussed on the following day, and agreed to,

under dire constraint, by a majority of 546 to 107. As soon as the result had been declared, one of the representatives of the ceded provinces, speaking on behalf of his colleagues, read a manifesto protesting against the subjection of Alsace and Lorraine to a foreign and hated yoke, and expressing a confident hope that those provinces would one day be reunited to France. Then he and his colleagues, Gambetta included, left the hall. They were French representatives no longer.

That very same night, by a striking coincidence, the mayor of Strasburg, who was also one of the deputies of Alsace, died at Bordeaux. Gambetta spoke a few eloquent burning words at the station before tne body was taken homewards, saying of the Alsatians that they had done their duty during the war, and done it, "they at least, to the end"; and on the following day—the 4th of March, I take it—he shook, as it were, the dust of Bordeaux from his feet, and retired to St. Sebastian beyond the Spanish frontier.

Here he remained till the 26th of the following June, in the enjoyment, as it would seem, of a season of complete idleness; and surely, if ever public man had earned a title to rest it was Gambetta, after the poignant anxieties, the incessant whirl and hurry, the sleepless labours of the last six months. When one thinks of the picture that has been painted for us of the Prefecture of Bordeaux during his dictatorship—the rooms, the stairs, the corridors, all overgorged with busy humanity, the clerks pursuing their toil in the midst of an incessant tumult, Gambetta himself called upon continually to harangue the crowd from the windows, to address deputations on the stairs, and having no private room, but only the back of a screen if he wanted to pen an important decree

or despatch, only the space behind a door if he wished to hold a private interview, however important—when one thinks of this, and of the enormous amount of work accomplished under such immensely fatiguing conditions, there is small room for wonder that he should have felt the necessity for a season of peace. The policy with which he had completely identified himself was rejected by the country. Though successful in the highest sense, as I have endeavoured to show, he had so far failed that the German armies remained undefeated. To those who judged superficially—and they were many—he seemed to have spent the blood of France altogether in vain, and not a few clamoured that that blood was upon his head. As Carnot had been called "the organiser of victory," so he was now insultingly called "the organiser of defeat." Clearly he was justified in thinking that for the time his mission had been accomplished, and his work done. A true statesman's instinct taught him to retire temporarily from the arena. He might again strive to good effect in his country's cause—but not now.

So he remained at St. Sebastian till the 26th of the following June, doubtless enjoying the breezes that blew freshly from the Bay of Biscay, but also, we may be sure, with eyes turned in anxiety and sadness upon the events that were passing in France. For during the weeks of his sojourn on Spanish soil the insurrection of the Commune had flared up in Paris, and, after passing its hideous course from the 28th of March to the 28th of May, had been stamped out ruthlessly, though not perhaps more ruthlessly than it deserved. And daily it was becoming clearer that the majority of the Assembly intended, sooner or later,

to abolish the Republican form of government. This, to a man of Gambetta's opinions, would simply have been the abomination of desolation, and we may fairly conclude that it was the desire to prevent, as far as in him lay, so disastrous a result, which induced him to abandon his retreat. Elections to fill vacancies in the Assembly were to be held. The Department of the Seine offered him a seat. He accepted the candidature, and on the 26th of June returned to public life, and on his way northwards addressed a large public meeting at Bordeaux.

In order, however, to understand the part he played during the next few years, it may be desirable here to explain, in greater detail, what was the position of the political world in France when he again entered upon the scene. The Assembly of Bordeaux had been elected, in the hottest haste, and chiefly in view of the pending and vital question of peace or war. It was an Assembly that bore, in many respects, a resemblance to the first Parliament of Charles II., and the Chamber of the *Introuvables* under the restored Louis XVIII. The majority of the members were country gentlemen—*Ruraux* as they came to be called in derision—men who lived more or less on their acres, who had no love for Imperialism in itself, and hated the disasters it had caused—men who, partly from old memories of 1793 and 1848, and partly from recent experiences during the war, entertained a profound distrust of Republicanism, and of Paris as a Republican city — feelings which the outbreak of the Commune naturally intensified a thousandfold. To such men Royalism came naturally, and having been called, very unexpectedly as they must have felt, to a position of paramount influence, they were pretty

sure, sooner or later, to endeavour to restore the government of their predilections. At first, indeed, they had been overawed by the gravity of the situation. When they came to Bordeaux, there were more pressing matters calling for settlement than even the ultimate form of the government. Moreover, they had not yet had time to organise their forces for concerted action. So they had committed the country at once, and almost blindly, but with a patriotism which ought to be recognised, into the hands of Thiers.

For Thiers was, without any question at all, the very foremost statesman in France. His past services, his immense experience, his superb gifts as an orator and debater, his admirably lucid and vigorous intellect, his capacity for work, his patriotism, the foresight with which he had protested against the foreign policy of the Empire and endeavoured to avert the war, the efforts he had made while the war was in progress to enlist the sympathies of Europe in the French cause—all marked him out as the only man to whom the broken fortunes of France could reasonably be committed. France, in the dearth of men created by the Imperial rule, possessed no other statesman of the first rank—no other statesman to be placed for a moment in line with Prince Bismarck. It was by a true and natural instinct that the Assembly, as one man, turned to him in the dark hour before the glimmer of that mournful peace. And, moreover, all his antecedents gave him a singular advantage at this particular moment. What the country obviously needed was union. To have shown a divided front to the enemy would have been ruin; and no other public man stood so nearly at the point of junction between differing parties as Thiers. His personal predilections

were known to have been always in favour of constitutional monarchy. He had been Louis Philippe's Minister, and though mainly in opposition during Louis Philippe's reign, had only been in opposition to his Ministers, and never to the monarchy itself. Then, when the Revolution of 1848 had precipitated France into a Republic, he had been the invariable supporter of law and order, and many a time and oft, with his magnificent gift of lucid speech, had thrown into disarray the ranks of the Socialists and other fanatics. So far, therefore, he was a *persona grata* to the Conservative Royalists who formed the "rural" party. On the other hand, his brilliant services as an opponent of Louis Napoleon's Government, and the skill and patriotism with which he had prevented the "rump" of the Corps Législatif from protesting against the Revolution of the 4th of September, and thus hopelessly dividing the country—these, and his very real if moderate liberalism, gave him great and deserved influence with the reasonable Republicans.*

Thiers accordingly was almost unanimously elected President; and the obvious policy marked out for him by the circumstances of the time was a policy of conciliation. To have endeavoured at once to give the country a definite form of Government would have been madness.

Is there anyone here [he had asked of the Assembly on the 19th of February, two days after his election as President]—Is there anyone here who would dare, in cold philosophic mood, to discuss the articles of a constitution while our prisoners are dying of want in distant lands, and our famishing fellow-countrymen are forced to deliver up to a foreign soldiery the last crust of their bread? No, no, gentlemen. To pacify, to reorganise, to re-establish our credit, to revive

* He had been elected by no less than twenty-six constituencies, and upwards of two million votes had been recorded in his favour.

our trade—that is the only policy possible and even conceivable at the present moment. To that policy every sensible, honest, enlightened person may worthily and effectually contribute, whatever may be his abstract views on the respective merits of a Monarchy or a Republic. . . . But when that work of reparation is accomplished [so the orator continued], then the time for weighing theories of government will have come.

Thus early did Thiers proclaim to the Assembly what was afterwards to be called the *Pacte de Bordeaux*—a kind of "truce of God" between the contending parties—and, as an earnest of excellent things, he selected his Ministers indiscriminately from among the ablest politicians of all shades of opinion, giving three of the most important "portfolios" to tried Republicans like Jules Favre, Ernest Picard, and M. Jules Simon, and the remainder to Legitimists and Orleanists.

But such a compact as that of Bordeaux could clearly only be maintained during a season of immense public anxiety. With the conclusion of peace, the defeat of the Commune, and the gradual pacification of the country, ordinary political aspirations, hopes, desires, jealousies reasserted themselves. Great as was Thiers' ascendency, "old parliamentary hand" as he might be, he could not prevent the Monarchist majority from perceiving—and acting upon—the obvious truth that the *de facto* Government was a Republic, and that the longer the Republic lived and did well, the less chance they had of replacing it by the Government of their dreams. Thiers knew this, of course, as well as they did, and accepted it as inevitable, though quite honestly determined, for his own part, not to prejudge the future more than could be helped. But naturally the majority were less patient. They felt increasingly that they had become

a majority in what may be called a "scratch" manner, and that it behoved them to make hay during their short hour of sunshine. Scarcely could the most sanguine have believed that another general election would place them in power once more. And meanwhile there were so many questions, religious, social, political, on which they felt strongly, and felt differently from the Republicans, and with regard to which they naturally considered that their views ought to prevail. Therefore, while forced to maintain Thiers in power, they were exceedingly jealous of his relations with the Republicans,* and daily harassed him with their doubts and ill-concealed distrust.

Such was the position of affairs when Gambetta returned to France on the 26th of June 1871; and into the very centre of that position he at once threw himself. Nothing can be clearer, as a political programme, than his speech at Bordeaux. It is a kind of trumpet blast, confidently summoning the Republican forces to battle and victory.

> When we study the present situation in France [he said], we arrive at this conclusion, that if the Republican party has the will it has the power; and that if its knowledge is equal to its power it will succeed in regenerating the country, and in founding a government at once free and secure against reaction and against internal weakness.

Then, accepting freely Thiers' formula that "power" must ultimately belong "to the wisest, and the most worthy," he cried:

> To the wisest! To the most worthy! By all means. These are conditions which we are specially bound to accept. Nor is such a

* At the end of May they had insisted on the dismissal of one of his Republican Ministers, Picard, and in the beginning of August Jules Favre resigned.

formula in any sense a novelty for us Republicans. It is one of our dogmas that the service of the State should be entrusted only to merit and virtue. It was to due respect for merit and uprightness that we vainly endeavoured to recall the Empire; it was, indeed, because political rectitude is opposed to all compromise with a power founded on crime and maintained by corruption that our opposition was then irreconcileable and revolutionary. Now, however [he went on to say], now that a Republic exists *de facto*, the duties of the party have clearly changed. Its heroic, chivalrous age has passed with the realisation of a part of its hopes. Henceforward it must be circumspect, patient, measured, politic. It must devote itself to the work of national education, using the word education in the largest sense. It must turn to the ignorant and disinherited, and make of universal suffrage, which is the embodiment of power in numbers, the embodiment of power enlightened by reason. It must crown the Revolution. . . . Ah! that peasant, devoted to the tilling of the soil, who bears so bravely the burden of the day, and does so with no other comfort than the hope of leaving to his children the paternal acre larger by one little rood, and concentrates in that one hope all his passions, his joys, and his fears! no sound comes to him from the great world beyond, from the human society in the midst of which he dwells, save rumours and empty breath; he falls an easy prey to the deceiver and the quack; he strikes, in his ignorance, at the breast of the Revolution, that has done so much for him; he gives loyally his taxes and his blood for the entertainment of a social order which he fears even more than he respects. But when he has done this, he considers that he has done all that can be required of him. Speak to him of principles, and he does not understand you, and naturally replies by talking to you of interests. And what else can you justly expect?. Therefore it is to the peasants that you must ceaselessly address yourselves; it is the peasants that you must elevate and instruct. The epithets *Rurality*, the *Rural* Chamber, which contending parties have cast at one another as insults, must be changed into terms of honour. Ah! it were indeed to be desired that there were a *Rural* Chamber in the true and deep sense of the word. . . . Unfortunately that point has not yet been reached. We shall not be able to make that step in our forward progress so long as French democracy has failed to demonstrate, and to demonstrate beyond all power of question, that if we wish to restore to our country its greatness, its power and its genius, the best interest of the higher classes is to elevate, to emancipate that world of workers which still holds in reserve, like revivifying sap, an inexhaustible treasure of activity and aptitude. We must first learn what society

owes to the peasant, and then teach the peasant what he owes to society. . . . If for the great work of national regeneration . . . ten or twenty years are required, then those ten or twenty years must be taken. But we must begin at once. Every year a new generation must be springing up, strong, intelligent, and devoted, with an equal devotion, to its country and to knowledge, and fulfilled with the feeling that we can only serve our country efficiently by serving it at once with our hands and our reason. . . . And I declare that peace and order will only be possible when every class of society has been brought to participate in the benefits of civilisation and knowledge, and to consider the government as a legitimate emanation of its own sovereignty, and not as a master at once jealous and grasping. Until that happy consummation, and so long as we persist in following our present disastrous ways, you will have the ignorant at one time supporting a *Coup d'État*, and, at another, making themselves the auxiliaries of revolution; and we shall remain exposed to the impious fury of blinded multitudes laying destructive hands even on the traditional objects of their respect, because unable to satisfy their impossible appetites, and in vengeful fury accumulating round themselves ruin. . . . Consequently the politician, in the accomplishment of his task, must make it his first duty to uproot that evil of evils from which all others spring: ignorance—ignorance, without which it would be clear to all men that the form of government most conformable to the nature, the dignity, and the happiness of man, is the Republic. . . . In short, I wish our opposition to be what one may call a government opposition. I wish to have no other end in view but to put the country into the right course, or compel others to do so. For I know a yet stronger passion than that of exercising power in one's own person, and that is to watch its loyal exercise by others, and to see others accomplish all essential reforms under the simple constraint of truth, equity, and public spirit. . . . If the Republic is pre-eminently the government of right, cannot all parties find shelter under its wing? Is it not the only form of government under which access to power is open to those who have best approved themselves to public opinion by their talents and their virtues? And such being the case, may we not turn to those who have professed anti-Republican opinions, and say to them, "Ah! you wish at last to establish a Republic, and govern it after your own fashion. Very well, we only ask one thing of you, and that is that you shall begin by really recognising the Republic. When once you have done that, we are perfectly prepared to place rule and government in your hands. . . . But, as a first condition, it is necessary that the Republican party should be unalterably firm in the maintenance of its principles, and we here declare that we will show the utmost indulgence so far as

persons are concerned, and open the doors of the Republic wide, so that whosoever will may enter therein. But as regards our principles, we will remain implacable."

I have quoted from this speech freely, because it marks so well what was Gambetta's attitude on re-entering public life. He was still, as will be seen, full of an exuberant belief in the power of "the Republic" to work wonders for the regeneration of the country. He had an equally ardent belief in education. He entertained no doubt that Universal Suffrage, when duly enlightened, would sweep away every abuse, and make all things new. He was still, in short, in a kind of morning glow of golden hopes —hopes which time, the impassive judge of things and men, has so far scarcely ratified. Nevertheless, with whatever exaggeration, he was, in my view, right in his belief that the Republican form of government was the one best fitted for France. And in his willingness — which was quite genuine — to forego the sweets of office and power, both for himself and his friends, if only his ideas could have practical effect, there was a high disinterestedness rare everywhere, and in France singularly rare. Such utterances are those of a real patriot, and when judging Gambetta's character they should not be forgotten.

He was elected on the 2nd of July by three Departments, and came back to the Assembly, then sitting at Versailles, as one of the representatives of Paris— taking his place, as before, at the Extreme Left, among the Radical members. Those who had not seen him since the old Paris days, before the war, noticed that the "Terrible Year" had left its traces upon him—that he had lost somewhat of his youthful

look, and was stouter than of yore, and that there were streaks of white in the blackness of his hair.

From the first it was clear that he would have some difficulty in obtaining a hearing from the Assembly. The elections of the 2nd of July had gone heavily in favour of the Republicans, and the Royalist majority must have seen pretty clearly that power was slipping out of their hands, and were not in the best of tempers. The speeches which he made on the 22nd of July and 8th of August were repeatedly interrupted by such cries as "There are no dictators here—we are not at Bordeaux"; and on the 30th of August, amid a scene of great tumult, he hurled at his adversaries, who were taunting him on the subject of the revolution of the 4th of September, this stinging retort:—

> What did we do on the 4th of September? On the 4th of September we overthrew the Empire, after you had pronounced its deposition; on the 4th of September we saved you from shame; on the 4th of September we rescued you from anarchy and terror, and we rendered to France a due and fitting service.

But this speech of the 30th of August is memorable on other grounds than because it afforded to Gambetta an opportunity of turning on his enemies with these quick rapier thrusts. The question in debate arose out of the proposal of a certain M. Rivet, who, having in view the unsettled state of the country, wished Thiers to be declared titular President of the Republic for three years with constitutional powers more strictly defined, the proposal being prefaced by a declaration of the right of the Assembly to vote a Constitution. To the declaration of any such right Gambetta was, however, strongly adverse. Nor was he mollified by the sop of an official recognition of the Republic. Looking at the circum-

stances in which the Assembly had been elected, looking much more at the opinions of its members, he held strenuously to the view that it had received from its constituents no authority to settle the ultimate form of the Constitution, and that when once the question of peace or war had been decided, and the last of the Germans removed from French soil, its mission would be at an end. Naturally the majority took a very different view; and there is no room for doubt — M. Jules Simon admits as much — that if the Assembly had been a Republican Assembly, the Republicans would have made no difficulty whatever in admitting its "constituent" powers. Nay, Gambetta himself, as we shall presently see, accepted a Constitution in 1875 from this very same Assembly, and did so without scruple. Meanwhile, however, and so long as the spirit of the majority remained militant and unbroken, it was his obvious cue to resist any motion implying that the Assembly possessed more than a temporary mandate. To preach the Republic, and prevent any other form of government from being established, remained his mission during the next four years.

On the 7th of September, shortly after the debate on M. Rivet's motion, Gambetta appeared before the "Parliamentary Commission" recently appointed to inquire into the "Acts of the Government of National Defence." Such an inquiry had been proposed, almost as soon as the Assembly first met at Bordeaux, by the extreme Radicals, Louis Blanc, Victor Hugo, Quinet, and other dissatisfied representatives of Paris, and it was now taken up again by the majority, and in no friendly spirit. Saint-Marc Girardin, an Orleanist, presided nominally, and Saint-Marc Girardin,

besides being an able journalist, an admirable critic, and a classic writer in the best sense, was a man of fair and judicial mind. But he was in failing health, and the task of conducting the inquiry devolved mainly on M. Daru, an Imperialist. Gambetta naturally had no mind to be cross-examined as to his deeds by any servant of the Empire, nor would it have been fitting that he should be subjected to the ordeal; and, at his request, Saint-Marc Girardin occupied the chair on the occasion, and presided with dignity and measure. As to Gambetta's evidence, I have already quoted as much as is necessary for my biographical purpose; and it may be enough to add that neither then, nor on future occasions, when the contracts entered into by the Government of National Defence were under inquiry, was anything brought forward or elicited which left the slightest semblance of a stain on his personal honour. Even the fiercest light of party rancour proved powerless here.

The Assembly adjourned on the 17th of September 1871, and did not meet again till the 4th of December. Meanwhile Gambetta had passed through a severe illness; had started, on the 3rd of November, with the co-operation of his friends and more immediate supporters, a newspaper, bearing the appropriate title of the *République Française*; and had begun at Saint-Quentin, on the 16th of November, a series of popular political addresses destined, during the next few months, to excite his opponents to the very highest pitch of exasperation. These addresses were delivered pretty well everywhere, and on varying pretexts. At Saint-Quentin the occasion was a patriotic banquet given in commemoration of the manner in which the town had resisted the attack of the Ger-

mans. At Angers and Le Havre (7th and 18th April 1872) there was no special occasion, beyond a desire to fan the zeal of the provincial Republicans. At Paris (9th May) an address of delegates from Alsace had to be answered. At Versailles (on the 24th of June), the birthday of General Hoche, one of the saints of Republicanism, had to be commemorated. At La Ferté-sous-Jouarre—but why particularise? Suffice it to say that between September 1871 and May 1873 Gambetta was pretty well everywhere, south, east, west, and north, preaching, exhorting, convincing. *Le commis-voyageur de la République*—the "bagman of the Republic"—his enemies called him in derision, and he accepted the taunt proudly. Yes, he was the bagman of the Republic, holding it to be his mission to disseminate its wares throughout the land. He felt no inclination to be ashamed of those wares. They were, in his view, of the most excellent quality, and good altogether for the healing of the nation. Could there be any more useful work, with a reactionary Assembly in power, than to go about preaching and proclaiming the turpitude of the Empire; the benefits conferred on mankind, rural as well as urban, by the French Revolution; the necessity of crowning the work of the Revolution by placing power more unreservedly in the hands of the lower classes; the urgent need of a national regeneration through education and work; the essentially orderly character of the Republican party; the desirability of subordinating the Church more entirely to the State; the evils of clericalism; the duty of dissolving the Assembly; the radiant future in store for France when once "the Republic" reigned in its majesty supreme? These, with a good deal of impassioned patriotism,

and some grudging at the Germans, formed the materials out of which his speeches were built. Not in themselves very varied materials, perhaps, and some of them of a decidedly untrustworthy and obsolete character, but put together with a master architect's consummate skill so as to take the popular eye and popular imagination. We in England are, it may be, a little *blasé* to such exhibitions; yet even with us an oratorical campaign has been known to influence the policy of the country. In France they were not *blasé* at all. No one that I can remember had previously "stumped the country" in the same way; and the effect was proportionately great.

Of course, the majority were outraged and indignant. In his speech at Angers on the 7th of April 1872, Gambetta had spoken of their "intrigues," and on the 18th, at Havre, he had passionately advocated a dissolution. A week afterwards, on the 25th, M. Raoul Duval inquired of the Government whether it was with their approval that the mayors of the towns in question had been present while such deleterious addresses were being delivered. And on the 18th of November a yet more embarrassing attack was made on the Government. Gambetta had been in the south-east of France during the preceding autumn, making a kind of royal progress, and everywhere *fêted* and acclaimed; and in a great oration at Grenoble, on the 26th of September, after hailing the advent to power of "a new social stratum," he had passionately declaimed against the Versailles Assembly, crying that there was nothing to be hoped for in that direction, and that the country must turn for deliverance to the organised power of Universal Suffrage. Whereupon, a few days after the meeting

of the Assembly in November, a leading member of the Right, General Changarnier, made a strong appeal to the Government. Changarnier was a fine distinctive Parliamentary figure, a veteran of upwards of eighty, who had fought with the utmost bravery in Africa, had done good service in maintaining order in 1848—in short, a thorough type of the best kind of French officer—and the majority listened to him complacently as he accused Gambetta of having insulted the Assembly, outraged Religion, and endeavoured to foment evil political passions.

I am unfortunate enough [said the orator, who belonged to an older parliamentary school] not to admire M. Gambetta's noisy eloquence. [And he went on to say] I pray, I beseech the President of the Republic, whom I have loved so much, whom I love still, to ally himself with the majority of the Assembly in combating the increasing boldness of Radicalism . . . to separate the Government frankly, openly, from a colleague* who is disposed to overturn everything for the purpose of resuming a disastrous dictatorship, the return whereof would imply the eternal ruin of France.

The proposal was an embarrassing one for the Government, because Thiers, in the face of the hostility of the Right, was compelled to lean more and more on the Left, and had strong reasons for hesitating to disavow any section of the party. But he was, as I have said, "an old parliamentary hand," and for this time, at least, his enemies found no occasion against him. Nor should I have related the incident, except that it shows how thoroughly Gambetta had succeeded in exciting the ire of the Monarchists. They hated him for his popular addresses; they hated and feared him for the qualities he was displaying in the Assembly itself. His "noisy eloquence" might not

* "Factious demagogue" was the expression first used, but withdrawn at the request of the President.

be to Changarnier's taste, but there must have been few, even among his opponents, who, watching his career at this time, did not see what an important Parliamentary leader he was becoming. If there had hitherto been a temptation to regard him as no more than a "Rupert of Debate," good for slashing and sword-play—a sort of politician with a touch of the maniac about him—that temptation had now clearly had its day. He was showing that he knew how to wait, and had learnt the orator's difficult lesson of the value of silence. He spoke comparatively very seldom, and when he did it was as often as not on some question of what may be called an administrative and practical character. Thus, on the 1st of February 1872, he made a speech on the commercial treaties with England, and on the 1st of June he discussed at length the system of recruiting for the army. His attitude generally was no longer that of the outside critic; it was that of the man who has felt the weight and cares of Government, and knows he may have to bear them again. At the same time, outward and visible signs were not wanting of a desire to cultivate the respectabilities of life. In the old days before the fall of the Empire, and even somewhat later, he had been carelessly Bohemian in his dress and appearance; and M. Rochefort, as we have seen, had accused him of dirt and an affected slovenliness. Now, though he always remained very far on the less tidy side of dandyism, there was a marked change for the better. He seems to have felt that something was due to Republicanism as the party of order. How should order show itself about the world in a frayed and unbrushed coat?

At the same time his manner of life should have

given the lie to the legends in circulation of wealth amassed by public plunder during the war. As he had lived before in the days of his almost brieflessness, even so, or with comparatively little change, he lived now. He had taken apartments on his return to Paris at No. 12 Rue Montaigne, apartments consisting of a study, where his secretary sat and worked, a dining-room, a drawing-room, two bed-rooms, and a kitchen, all of the most modest dimensions. Here Aunt Massabie presided as of old, cooking for him the southern dishes he loved so well. Here his friends would gather round him, partaking of the often homely fare, and listening to his exuberant brilliant talk. Here the deputation from Alsace-Lorraine come to give him a statuette in bronze, commemorative of the sorrows and undying hate of the severed provinces.

Meanwhile, he was busy with his newspaper, the *République Française,* now fast becoming a power in the land. Among the members of the staff were M. de Freycinet, who had so ably seconded him as war-administrator during the recent campaign, and has since occupied the post of Prime Minister; M. Spuller, who had accompanied him in his balloon flight from Paris; M. Challemel-Lacour, who had shared his modest retreat at Bordeaux after the cessation of hostilities; M. Paul Bert, whose career was afterwards to come to so sad an end at Tonquin. But though Gambetta trusted his co-adjutors, he was no *Roi fainéant,* no King Log, on the editorial throne. He impressed his own personality stongly on the paper, and controlled its contents with an iron hand. And as he himself was now exhibiting, in his public capacity, certain unexpected qualities of measure and self-restraint, so the *République Fran-*

çaise assumed at once the position of a very "serious" periodical, avoiding for the most part those personalities which are the bane of French journalism, and discussing great questions in their larger aspect. From a literary point of view also, the paper was altogether sober and creditable.

So passed the year 1872 and the earlier months of 1873; and, meanwhile, the breach between Thiers and the majority of the Assembly was growing daily wider and wider. But the latter, anxious as they were to overturn the Government, had the grace and patriotism to hesitate and hold back so long as the negotiations with Germany remained uncompleted. Thanks, however, to the old statesman's skill as a diplomatist and financier, no very long time elapsed before that scruple was removed. On the 17th March 1873, M. de Rémusat, the Foreign Minister, finally announced to the Assembly that arrangements had been made for the payment, on the 5th of the following September, of the last instalment of the huge war indemnity, and for the final evacuation of French territory by the hated invader. Whereupon the Assembly —they could no other, for the general feeling of relief was unbounded—immediately passed a vote of thanks to Thiers, coupling it, however, as the Opposition said, with a sort of general vote of thanks to themselves. "Now," said M. Jules Simon to Thiers on the following day, at the meeting of the Cabinet Council, "Now you can say your *Nunc dimittis*."

But the end was not quite yet. Though the Right had clearly determined, sooner or later, to depose Thiers, they seemed still to be hesitating and half-hearted. They could not at first muster courage, as it would appear, even to accept the resignation of the

Republican President of the Assembly, M. Grévy, when he tendered it, on the 2nd of April, after a noisy sitting* during which his authority had been rudely questioned. They were not prepared for power, and would probably have gone on temporising for some time longer if an event had not occurred to intensify their fears and spur their flagging zeal. And, curiously enough, the event which finally had that result was one which Gambetta had contributed, if not quite done his best, to bring about. On the 27th of April an election was to be held in Paris. Looked at dispassionately, the constituency of Paris is not in any way remarkable for the possession of the political sense. It is a constituency that has a persistent love of opposition for its own sake—irrespective of the government that may be in power—and it habitually mistakes declamation, more or less eloquent, for practical statesmanship. Nevertheless, its actions are always watched with a particularly keen interest; and an importance which, to the outsider, appears quite disproportionate, is attached to its decisions. So it is now. So it was then. Of the comparative merits of the two candidates, there could not be a single moment's question. One was M. de Rémusat, the Foreign Minister, who had just been helping Thiers in his negotiations with the Germans, and a man of whom any Parliament might have been proud. The other was a certain M. Barodet, ex-mayor of Lyons, and a Radical nonentity. Thiers, with his usual self-will, and in spite of warnings, had persisted in sending M. de Rémusat to the poll. He relied upon his friend's merit, and the great increase of popularity which the Government had so recently acquired.

* On the previous day.

Gambetta took the other side. He announced himself as the supporter of M. Barodet, and made a great speech at Belleville, in which, though without any profession of enthusiasm for that individual, he supported his candidature. M. Barodet, it need scarcely be said, was elected, and by a majority of 40,000 votes.

That Gambetta made a mistake on this occasion, even his admirers are mostly constrained to admit. What was the use of preaching the sanity and moderation of "the Republic" in the face of such an election? Thiers, as must have been patent to all, was struggling through good report and evil report, and against the greatest obstacles, to govern the country in a Republican sense, and lead it to an ultimately Republican goal. Was this a time at which to weaken and embarrass him by showing that he had no hold on the great popular metropolitan constituency? Clearly, quite apart from any feeling of gratitude for public services at once recent and immense, it was the duty of all Republicans, at this particular crisis, to rally round him and his candidates. Nor is it easy to understand why Gambetta should not have done so, unless—which one hesitates to offer as an explanation—he was afraid of jeopardising his popularity with the Radicals of Belleville.

Be that as it may, a mistake had been committed, and the consequences followed thereon with swift feet. When the Assembly met again, after the recess, on the 19th of May, the first thing the majority did was to give notice of a motion, signed by 320 members, urging on the Government the necessity of pursuing a "resolutely conservative policy." On the 23rd the motion came on for discussion, and the

Duc de Broglie rose to support it. His attitude might have been more frank. Instead of openly attacking the Government because it was helping to found a Republic, while he and his friends preferred a Monarchy, he dwelt on the internal dissensions in the Cabinet, on its complaisance for the Radicals, and its want of power to support sane conservative doctrines. Dufaure, the fine old Parliamentarian, replied point by point to M. de Broglie's speech, pressing it hard in the meshes of his serried dialectics. Thiers, owing to the absurd formalities with which his appearance at the tribune had been surrounded, was unable to speak on the same day. But on the following morning, the morning of the 24th, he made his defence to the Assembly. Disdaining the smaller points raised by his antagonists, he went straight to the heart of the question. At Bordeaux, eighteen months before, any settlement of the ultimate form of government would have been impossible. Now it was imperative; and in the face of the dissensions of the Monarchists, if for no other reason, a Republic was the only practical solution.

We have [said Thiers, in conclusion], reorganised and delivered France; that was our first duty, and it is accomplished. Now we must have some definite government. We propose to you to found it, and to found it at once; and we add that that government must be a Republic, and can be nothing else but a Republic. Will you found a Republic? We are here to do it with you. Do you wish rather to prolong, to the detriment and peril of France, the present period of indecision and uncertainty? Then overthrow us. You are acting on that issue and that alone.

Thus spoke a great statesman, and thus he spoke, alas! in vain. The Conservatives, or those who called themselves such, failed to see that true Conservatism in France consisted then, as now, not in endeavouring

to re-establish ephemeral forms of monarchy, but in consolidating the Republican form, and guarding it especially from disintegration at the hands of internal enemies. In an afternoon meeting on the same day—Thiers had ungraciously been compelled to speak at 9 o'clock in the morning—the Government were outvoted by a majority of 360 to 344; and in a later evening meeting a letter was read from Thiers announcing his resignation, and the majority proceeded forthwith to elect Marshal MacMahon as President. The Monarchical reaction triumphed, if not all along the line, at least in the Assembly; and the first chapter in the history of the Versailles Parliament came to a close.

CHAPTER VII.

GAMBETTA FOUNDS THE REPUBLIC.

1873—1875.

Danger of disturbances—Gambetta deprecates appeal to physical force—A scene in the Chamber—The three Monarchical parties—Attempts to found a monarchy—The Comte de Chambord refuses to give up the white flag—End of the De Broglie Ministry—Resuscitation of Imperialist party—Gambetta denounces their intrigues—Efforts of Thiers and Gambetta in favour of a Republic—"Opportunism"—Its success—Republic founded *de jure* on the 30th of January 1875—A hitch—It is overcome—The foundation of the Republic—The country mainly indebted for this result to Gambetta.

AMONG those who were at all behind the scenes in politics, there had for some time been little doubt that the fall of Thiers was imminent. But to the general public the events of the 24th of May came as a surprise, a shock, almost a thunderclap. Scarcely more than a few days had passed since the country was ringing with the deposed statesman's praise; and however much it might suit such adversaries as the venomous pressman, Louis Veuillot, to decry his services, and call him insultingly "a sinister old man," the great majority of Frenchmen knew and acknowledged that it was to him mainly that France owed her

comparative recuperation after the terrible disasters of the war and the Commune. *He* had conducted the negociations with the enemy to a successful issue. *He* had quelled the hideous insurrection in Paris. *His* was the name that had restored public confidence and credit. The country felt naturally ashamed and indignant at being compelled, *nolens*, *volens*, to add so ugly a chapter to the ugly records of national ingratitude.

There was some danger lest such feelings should find violent expression, especially as the reactionary opinions of the majority in the Assembly were by no means to the taste of the majority in the country. But any popular rising or disorder would obviously have played effectually into the hands of the new Government. The majority were, after all, strictly within their rights in overthrowing a Ministry which no longer possessed their confidence. It would have been a trump card indeed if they could have pointed to their opponents as ready at a moment's notice to appeal to physical force for the solution of constitutional questions. Did not they, the Monarchists, claim to be essentially the party of order, and habitually brand the Republicans as the fautors of misrule? Was it not their mission to save the land from anarchy, and would they not have said immediately, "here is armed anarchy lifting up its head?" These considerations had pressing weight with the Republican deputies, and on the very day of Thiers' overthrow, the 24th of May, one hundred and twenty-six of them signed an address to the French people, saying that never had the calm of confidence and conscious power been more necessary to the salvation of France and the Republic.

Gambetta signed the address as a matter of course.

To the use of physical force he was consistently opposed throughout his career, holding that the principles of democratic Republicanism were in themselves so excellent as to be sure of ultimate triumph by means of argument alone. And to the weapons of argument he now again betook himself, and with redoubled zeal. His policy during the preceding months, from July 1871 to May 1873, had been directed towards three main objects. He had endeavoured to popularise Republican opinions throughout the constituencies, to prevent the monarchical Assembly from establishing a permanent Constitution, and to obtain a dissolution of the Assembly and an appeal to the country. With the defeat of Thiers—practically a defeat of moderate Republicanism—and the election of Marshal MacMahon as President, and with the appointment of the Duc de Broglie as Prime Minister, those objects naturally assumed an intensified importance. Now indeed the Republic was in real and imminent jeopardy. Now was the time for all good Republicans to stand shoulder to shoulder in its defence. The new de Broglie-Beulé Ministry called itself a *Ministère de Combat*, a "ministry of battle," and regarded itself as leading the "moral forces" of society to victory over the democratic hordes. And if the Ministry wanted battle, battle they should have. Gambetta, who had not hitherto taken more than a comparatively subordinate part in the debates of the Assembly, now stepped forward into the forefront of the attack.

A brilliant skirmish was his first affair. The Ministry signalised its advent to power, as French ministries are so unfortunately apt to do, by making great changes in the *personnel* of the permanent administra-

tion; and it also at once began to worry the Liberal press. On the 8th of June a Radical paper, the *Corsaire*, was suppressed, and on the 10th the question of its suppression was brought before the House. The discussion had gone on for some short time, M. Lepère had attacked the Government, and M. Beulé had replied with rare infelicity,* when Gambetta arose. It was not his intention, he said, to go into the particular question raised by the two previous speakers. The point which he rather wished to elucidate was the attitude of the new Ministry towards the press. Was it true—but the whole scene is so dramatic, it illustrates so well Gambetta's readiness and resource under the fire of interruptions, that I cannot do better than quote it almost entire.

GAMBETTA.—I was saying that, besides the measures taken openly with regard to the Press, there are measures of an occult character, there is a clandestine design . . . (Denials to the right). No denials, pray, gentlemen; you will see reason to regret your precipitancy! (Ironical laughter to the right. Several voices: "We know all about it.") If you know all about it, pray allow me to put the whole public into your confidence also. [M. DE CUMONT: That is exactly what we want.] Then you will be satisfied directly; pray exercise a little patience. I repeat that, apart from the open and avowed measures which we have just been considering, I wish to question the Minister of the Interior relative to what I will venture to call the occult measures and designs of the Cabinet with regard to the Press. Is it true that on Wednesday, the 4th of June, a circular was addressed, from the Ministry of the Interior, to all the Prefects throughout France—a circular which I will ask the Assembly to allow me to read? (A voice to the right: "How did you get hold of it?" To the left: "Don't interrupt.") You will be able to check me as I read, gentlemen, inasmuch as you say you are already acquainted with the terms of the circular. All the means of comparing my copy of the circular with the original will thus be at your disposal, and

* He described the Assembly as having been elected "in an unfortunate hour"—a sentiment which the Left cheered vociferously. So far they were entirely with him.

you will be free to enlighten us fully on the question of authenticity. I only ask the Government one question. Let them deny or admit the authenticity of the circular, and we shall determine our future course of action with regard to it accordingly. (Interruptions; murmurs to the right.) Here, then, is the circular: "Send me at once a report on the Press in your department. The time has come for doing something to recover the authority and influence lost through an affectation of indifference and neutrality." (Cheers to the right; murmurs to the left.) [M. HENRI VINAY: Why, so far, there is nothing to object to. "Oh! oh!" to the left.] [M. MALENS: Some allies are very dangerous.] I perfectly understand these cheers, gentlemen, and am not in the least surprised that some of our colleagues should approve of a circular which has for its object to organise the official press in view of the election of official candidates. (Voices to the right: "And how about your own candidatures?") [M. DE GASLONDE: The Government only wanted to get statistics.] Nothing can be more natural and more in accordance with the facts of human nature, and it is such circulars as these which may perhaps enable us to define with precision and full knowledge what we are to understand by "moral order." (Applause to the left; prolonged interruptions to the right.) Gentlemen, if you did not interrupt me, I should be able to read the circular straight through from end to end. But I am obliged to stop to answer your remarks. "Tell me which are the Conservative papers, or those which might be induced to become such. . ." ("Oh! oh!" and laughter to the left.) [M. VINAY: Concessions are expected.] Conversions are anticipated among the editors—it is all quite natural. "Tell me which are the Conservative papers, or those that might be induced to become such; what is their financial position—("Ah! ah!" to the left)—and the price they would probably attach to the help and goodwill of the Government." (Noisy exclamations to the left; prolonged agitation.) [M. CHALLEMEL-LACOUR: Always, of course, in the interests of moral order.] "Tell me the names of the editorial staff, their opinions so far as known, and their antecedents. If you can obtain an interview with them, ascertain if they would accept communications from the Government, and in what form." (Renewed laughter to the left. A member to the right: "That's a little better." Several voices: "Go on"!) Oh, I quite understand that you should not wish to lose a single word. "We are about to organise a bulletin of telegraphic and original news, which will be sent to you regularly, and measured out by you according to the degree of confidence . ." (Noise to the right.) [M. LE DUC DE BROGLIE: Very well?] How "very well"? Can there be room for two opinions on a document of this kind? (Exclamations to the right. Several members: "You always did the

same thing.") [M. VINAY: Why, it was what you did yourself every day!] (Noise. Voices to the left: "Don't answer; read! read!") Gentlemen, a moment ago you were all impatience to hear me read, and now that I am really reading as slowly as I can, you display another kind of impatience which really seems to me quite laudable. You are very disagreeably impressed by what I am reading, and you are quite right to be so. (Marks of dissent to the right.) You feel inclined to protest, your sense of delicacy is offended. (To the right: "No, no!") You are outraged, and rightly so. (Applause to the left. Marks of dissent to the right.) You were recently accused of being under the protection of the Empire, and now you are imitating the Empire in a servile manner—nay, you are even going beyond the Empire. (Renewed applause to the left.) I resume: "We are about to organise a bulletin of telegraphic news,"—that is, news which you will create, not merely re-echo. [M. BOITEAU: That 's exactly what you did yourself.] No, sir, that 's not the case. I never did it. Quote a single fact. (Cries and interruptions; murmurs to the left. A voice to the left: "Don't answer.") "A bulletin of telegraphic and original news, which will be sent to you regularly, and measured out by you according to the degree of confidence which you may feel in the various papers. To do this effectually, you will do well to organise in your office a press department, to which those employés shall not be admitted who are"—here there is a doubtful word—it may be natives of the place (*indigènes*), or indigent (*indigents*); you may take your choice. (Laughter to the left.) "Give me your opinion on these points. I rely upon your tact. There can be no more delicate question"—I am sure you quite felt that yourselves, gentlemen, a moment ago—"nor one that requires more prudence and skill. Cultivate the acquaintance of the representatives of the Press, and make yourself very accessible to them at all times." (A few voices to the right: "Well?") I shall not add a single word to such a circular. If authentic, it enables us to judge what kind of "moral order" is being introduced into the government of the country. (Bravo! and prolonged applause to the left.)

Does not one see it all? Never can the theatre of Versailles, built for such different performances in the days of the old Monarchy, have witnessed a scene more essentially dramatic. There are the seven hundred deputies wondering, as the orator begins, what he is driving at, the small knot of thick-and-thin supporters

of the Ministry determined to clamour him down, the respectable majority of the Right genuinely ashamed of the part they are called upon to play, the Left jubilant, exultant, wild with the passion of battle. There is Gambetta himself, "riding on the whirlwind," if not exactly "directing the storm," Gambetta at the tribune, dishevelled, with his hair over his forehead, gesticulating, indignant, sabring his opponents with each sentence of the unhappy circular, glad at heart that their interruptions and intermittent clamour compel him thus to afflict them with it sentence by sentence, and to repeat and redouble the more damaging passages, instead of simply reading it from end to end—answering the storm below with quick flashes of sarcasm and scorn. It is told of Rachel, the unparalleled actress, that she was once taken to hear Guizot speak, and that after listening to him for awhile, she declared that she would have liked to act with him in tragedy. I can imagine some great actor—M. Coquelin, let us suppose—coming away from this memorable sitting of the Assembly with the feeling that to play in very serious comedy with Gambetta would be a pleasure. "Moral order" did not soon recover from the effects of that unhappy press circular.

And "moral order" hated Gambetta the more. On the 12th of July a member of the Right, M. Kerdrel, again raised the question of the Grenoble speech with its irritating reference to the "new social stratum," and on the 14th and 26th of July, the House being about to adjourn, a law was discussed, and ultimately passed, having almost as its avowed object to put a gag on the great popular tribune, and circumscribe

his "liberty of prophesying" within very narrow limits.*

Nor, from their point of view, were the majority altogether wrong in striving to stifle Gambetta's voice, for they had work in prospect which he was not likely to further. A monarchy, a restoration, that is what they were contemplating. No doubt the task was difficult—all tasks are difficult when those on whom they devolve are at variance among themselves. And here the parties, united in a common hatred of the Republic, differed altogether as to the form of monarchy which they wished to found on its ruins. Three Richmonds were in the field, each with his separate band of adherents. First came the Comte de Chambord, who represented the elder branch of the Bourbons, and was King by right divine, as his supporters held. Next came the Comte de Paris, grandson of Louis Philippe, and son of that Duke of Orleans whose accidental death had been so sad a blow to France—he represented monarchy in its constitutional form. Then came the Prince Imperial, a fine young fellow, who, by the death of his father, the ex-Emperor, had just become the recognised chief and hope of the Imperialists. All three candidates could, obviously, not reign together. Which would have to give way? The Prince Imperial was, for the nonce, "out of the running," his adherents in the Assembly too few, the disasters which Louis Napoleon had brought on France too recent. But as between the Comte de Chambord and the Comte de Paris, was not some accommodation possible? The former had

* The Government had the power of stopping the sale of any newspaper in the streets. Two newspapers suffered this penalty for publishing a speech made by Gambetta on the 28th of September.

no children, and on his death the divine right would pass of itself to the latter. Seeing the obvious desirability, from a party point of view, of effecting a fusion of the two branches of the Bourbons, the Comte de Paris was induced to give way. On the 5th of August he went on a formal visit to Frohsdorff, and openly acknowledged the Comte de Chambord as legitimate King. Now, indeed, matters seemed going well. Three influential members of the Right were deputed to negotiate with the Comte de Chambord concerning the terms on which he would agree to reign over France, and the guarantees he would give in favour of civil and religious liberty—for even these Legitimist gentlemen seem to have felt that a pure government of *Ancien Régime* scarcely came within the region of practical politics.

"Paris was well worth a mass," such had been the declaration of the Comte's great ancestor, Henry IV., when he abandoned the Huguenot cause to become a somewhat perfunctory member of the Roman Church. The *Enfant du Miracle*, the "child of miraculous birth," as enthusiastic Loyalists had long years before dubbed the Count, would never have echoed that sentiment. No one probably has ever been found to call him a statesman, still less a politician. In intellect he was not above mediocrity. The hour of which I am speaking was the one hour of his real influence in the world's affairs. His niche in the great edifice of general history is neither important nor commanding. But small as it is, he occupies it worthily, for he was an entirely honourable and upright gentleman, making up in character what he may have lacked in mental gifts. Not for Paris, not for France itself, would he palter with his convictions. To the advances of those

who wished him to recognise the new order that had taken the place of the old, and to promise various constitutionalisms, he replied by a letter dated the 27th of October 1873, that it was not for him, whose right was of God, to bargain and make terms, not for him, above all, to give up the white flag of the ancient monarchy and adopt a flag like the tricolor, honourably stained no doubt on many a battle-field with French blood, but still the flag of the Revolution.

What was to be done with a kingly aspirant at once so honest and so impossible? Here was the way to a restoration quite obviously blocked: the Prince Imperial, as before stated, not available, the Comte de Paris placed by his own act in the position of an heir-expectant, with no claims as long as the Comte de Chambord lived, the Comte de Chambord himself a candidate absolutely unacceptable to all but the straitest and most fossilised of Legitimists. The situation was, as the majority felt, without possible issue, at least for the nonce. To remain, as far as might be, in *statu quo,* retaining the reins of power and waiting on events—this, in default of a better, was their best policy. So, on the 5th of November, when the Assembly met again, a Presidential message was read, proposing that the President's tenure of office should be made definite for a given period; and on the 19th a law was passed making it definite for seven years.

Practically, though they scarcely seem to have known it, the Republicans were succeeding to the utmost of their hopes. Gambetta's aim all through had been twofold: to keep the more ardent spirits of his own party quiet, and, while fomenting Republican

feeling in the country generally, to give the monarchical majority room and verge enough to show how completely their internal divisions rendered them incapable of founding a government. On both points he was carrying the day. Even democratic Paris had possessed its soul in patience during the negotiations for the restoration of "Henry V.," and the too honest "Henry V." had, by his letter of the 27th of October, effectually brought out the division among his followers. The old Legitimists especially were in the worst of tempers. The political sense was by no means their strong point, and they could with great difficulty be brought to perceive that a restoration then and there was not possible. The Duc de Broglie belonged to the other, or constitutional section of the party, and for the next few months his ministry had a very troubled existence, menaced as it was by the whole of the Left and ill-supported by the extreme Right and the small knot of the Imperialists. Finally, a coalition of these heterogeneous elements put an end to its existence on the 16th of May 1874.

So far Gambetta's aims had had their full accomplishment. A restoration of the Bourbons was, for the time at least, proved to be impossible, and the anti-Republicans were demonstrating their complete inability to found a stable government. But there was a great and imminent danger lest the general uncertainty should be turned to account by the Imperialists. That party has always been good at fishing in troubled waters, and has mainly had a pretty knack of troubling the waters for the benefit of the sport. Here was one of their opportunities. They began to lift up their heads. On the 24th of May a Bonapartist was elected in the Department of the Nièvre, which had returned

a Radical six months before. On the occasion of a visit of the Emperor of Russia to the Prince Imperial, a French general stood beside the latter in full uniform. There were good reasons to believe that a permanent Imperialist Committee was busily intriguing throughout France, and, as the Republicans believed, with the connivance, if not the covert approval, of the new ministry, which contained several Imperialists. In the face of this resuscitation Gambetta seems to have felt that to re-slay the hated dead was the first duty of the hour. And he addressed himself to the task with considerable zest. At Auxerre, on the 1st of June, in an after-dinner speech, he described the statesmen of the Empire as "the corrupters and scoundrels who had taken France by surprise, and fattened upon her during twenty years"; he spoke of the Emperor himself as an "execrable and thrice accursed deceiver," as an Emperor of phantasm and chimera:—

Gentlemen [he exclaimed, after referring to France's yet recent disasters], gentlemen, if I recall these cruel and odious memories, odious because they bring back to us the sinister figure of the man who for the space of eighteen years stifled our liberties, and brought about the material ruin of France; cruel because, under that man's fatal dominion, France has lost not only a part of her territory and of her old renown, but those millions of savings which the workers in town and country had hoarded as marriage portions of their daughters, and for the education of their children—if, I say, I recall these memories, it is because people are speaking of a resurrection of the Bonapartist party; because such a resurrection has become matter of familiar conversation; because the supporters of that evil *régime*, built up by twenty years of favouritism and corruption, have cast off all fear, and reckoning on the native generosity of France, on that readiness to forget which makes her at once so thoughtless and so charming, are again prowling about our land; it is because, profiting by the negligence of some and the complicity of others, that evil pack is to be seen roaming through our thoroughfares, and to be heard giving tongue amongst us once more.

Let us curb their rashness, and that quickly; and to do this it is only necessary to show what they are, whence they come, and whither they would lead us.

So throughout the whole speech did the thunder of Gambetta's voice roll unreluctant over the fallen dynasty; and on the 9th of June, during a debate in the Assembly, he flashed upon the Imperialists with an almost fiercer scorn. The occasion arose in this wise: a circular had been found in a railway carriage purporting to emanate from an Imperialist committee, and suggesting certain occult means for obtaining the votes of retired officers. A Republican deputy had questioned the Ministers with regard to this circular, and received fairly satisfactory replies. Whereupon Rouher, the old vice-Emperor, rose and repudiated all knowledge of the document, and even of the committee, hinting that the former was an invention of the Republican enemy, and promising that, whenever its real source had been discovered, he would be prepared to go into the matter fully. Gambetta followed, and in the course of his remarks, which tended to show that there was a certain complicity between two of the Ministers at least and the Imperialists, he referred, but in perfectly moderate and parliamentary terms, to Rouher's promise. This brought Rouher to the tribune again. With an obvious wish to cause a diversion in the debate, and place Gambetta in a position of antagonism to the majority, he said:

M. Gambetta has reminded me that I had announced my intention of discussing this question at the tribune whenever the pending inquiry has been concluded. I shall fulfil that promise, and do so with more readiness than he has shown to meet the numerous attacks made against him in the reports of the divers Commissions of Inquiry appointed by the Assembly.

Here was a direct, and, it must really be said, very gratuitous provocation. Gambetta was not the man to blench before such a challenge.

Gentlemen [he replied], I have but one word to say. . . . In this Assembly I have never refused to enter into any debate or controversy with the honourable members whom you have appointed to act as Committees of Inquiry, and every time that a report has been produced at this tribune I have been ready to answer it; but I will add that there are those here whose right and title to question what was done by the revolution of the 4th of September I do not recognise, and those are the wretches who ruined France.

Whereupon there ensued a scene of indescribable confusion, and the President declared that if Gambetta did not withdraw the expression, he would be called to order. Gambetta, nothing daunted, replied: "Gentlemen, it is most certain that the expression I have just used contains more than an insult: it is a brand of infamy, and I maintain it!" Whereupon there was more confusion, more ringing of the President's bell, and Gambetta was called to order, and "named to the House."* Nor did the matter end there. The next day, the 10th of June, a band of rowdy Imperialists assembled at the Paris station, and insulted the orator and his friends on their return from Versailles. On the 11th there was a similar demonstration. On the 12th it was renewed once more, and a heated Imperialist made a personal attack on Gambetta, and struck him in the face. Finally, the station had to be occupied by detachments of cavalry and infantry.

The Imperialists were not well advised either in suffering public attention to be drawn to their in-

* Rather, perhaps, subjected to the French equivalent for that operation.

trigues, or in allowing the ruffian section of the party to break the public peace. Had they but known it, by their intrigues and rowdyism, nay by the mere signs of a renewed vitality, they were playing into their opponents' hands. Thiers and Gambetta, being astute parliamentary strategists, at once saw and seized their opportunity. The former began to manœuvre with a view to detach the more moderate section of the Monarchists, belonging to the Right Centre, from the Imperialists and the Extreme Right. The arguments which he used are pretty obvious, and ran much as follows: You see that, for various reasons, a Monarchy, whether absolute or constitutional, is for an indefinite period impossible. The country is manifestly weary of the present state of uncertainty. You cannot establish a Monarchy. You will not allow us to establish a Republic. The alternative, therefore, is the Empire, which you professed to hate as much as any of us while it was in power, and ought certainly not to love for the fruit of disaster and ruin which it has since borne. There are but two possible issues before you, a Republic or the Empire—Hyperion to a satyr, as my friend Gambetta would say—choose.

The Constitutionalists of the Right Centre were not as fully convinced as Gambetta that "the Republic" bore any resemblance to Hyperion. But they had many an old grudge against the Empire, and in their well-founded dislike for that form of government began to lend a not unwilling ear to the voice of the charmer. When it came, as we shall presently see, to the final tug of war, Thiers was found not to have argued and remonstrated in vain.

And Gambetta—he too had his strategical movement

to conduct in the advance against the common foe, and the operation was of some delicacy. For, on the one hand, he had to allay the fears of the more liberal section of the majority, and make them understand that in return for the permanent establishment of a Republic, his friends might be induced to admit the "constituent" powers of the Assembly, and accept a Constitution possessing such Conservative characteristics as detracted, in a Republican point of view, from its perfect ideal beauty; and, on the other hand, he had—a yet more difficult and ungrateful task—to induce his Radical friends to accept his leadership into the paths of moderation and compromise.

Compromise! Moderation! Here was *Opportunism* born into the world; and with its birth a great question of political morality at once faces us. According to the strictest sect of the Republicans, thereafter to be called the *Intransigeants*, Gambetta at this time paltered with principle and acted dishonestly. Nor, much as one may regret to find oneself in agreement with these politicians "of a creed outworn," can it be said, I think, that they were here altogether wrong. No doubt it is true, as Gambetta's adherents urged then, and urge now, and as Burke urged so eloquently a century ago, that abstract principles play but a sorry part in politics. No doubt it is true also that in the great ceaseless swaying of human interests and opinions, compromise, give-and-take, adaptability to circumstance, are essential to the world's government. But then, in order to be able to appeal to these truths in justification of his conduct, a statesman must have recognised them from the beginning, and not merely have had resort to them for some temporary advantage. Taking the case immediately before us, Gambetta

had for months past been making the country resound to his eloquent demonstrations that the Assembly had received no authority from the electorate to establish a permanent Government; that it had been elected for quite a different purpose; that it had ceased to represent the country; that it possessed no moral right whatever to take the future under its direction. The scene changes. The Assembly, for various reasons, cannot found a Monarchy and there seems a possibility that it may be induced to found a Republic. Forthwith it acquires that moral right which it had hitherto lacked so conspicuously. Despite of its origin, despite of its non-representative character, it becomes the legitimate arbiter of the ultimate destinies of France. But all this is clearly juggling with argument, and juggling in a not very honest way. If we talk of expediency let us talk of expediency, and if we talk of abstract right let us talk of abstract right, even though we may, in the latter case, be for the most part talking nonsense; but let us not mix our terms. Had Gambetta, during those preceding months, contented himself with opposing the claims of the majority on the ground that if full power were placed in their hands they would probably use it badly, then no one could have objected to his subsequent course. That, however, was not at all the ground he took up. He laid down, with all the appearance of passionate conviction, certain principles as to the powers of the Assembly, and almost immediately afterwards—the essential circumstances remaining the same—set those principles to one side. The whole thing, one cannot but admit, leaves an ill taste in the mouth.

That his policy was successful at the time is no

doubt true. As we shall presently see, he carried the foundation of the Republic. Nevertheless, looking dispassionately at the history of France during the years that have elapsed since then, there seems room to doubt whether that policy was successful in the highest and best sense. I do not mean here to echo the cry, uttered both then and since by the Extreme Left, to the effect that Gambetta, by allying himself with the Right Centre, cheated the legitimate hopes of Radicalism, compromised the work of "the Revolution," and so became responsible for unnumbered ills. What I rather mean is this: that by a change of principle so obviously founded on party interest, he lowered the tone of political morality in France. Not with impunity can convictions be degraded to the position of mere counters staked in the great game of politics. And the worst of it is that the trickery of the players brings discredit upon the game itself. If parliamentary government seems to have fallen into such poor esteem on the other side of the Channel, one cause at least is not far to seek. What loyalty can be felt towards a polity in which principle goes for so little, and finessing and intrigue for so much? Gambetta, it is to be feared, was at this time building up his Republic hastily, with rubble instead of stone, and with untempered mortar.

But setting the question of political morality to one side, we can but admire the skill which he displayed. In his speech at Auxerre, on the 1st of June 1874, there are already evidences, to whomsoever cares to read between the lines, that he had begun to "trim." He was clearly moderating the harsher tones of his voice, attenuating what had been offensive in his language with respect to the

"new social strata," seeking for kindly terms in which to refer to the *bourgeoisie*, the great middle class. Again, on the 24th of June, at Versailles, his speech consisted mainly of a panegyric on Thiers, and a declaration of the willingness with which the Republicans would accept recruits from among the old opponents of the Republic. And on the 31st of July, the Assembly being about to adjourn, he explained to the majority once more, in terms occasionally almost pathetic, how powerless they were to found a Monarchy, and how naturally they themselves would find due place and influence in a Republic. Then, when once the Assembly had dispersed, he kept silence. It was no time, as he felt, for impassioned public harangues. The country did not need stirring. Anything that he could say would only afford pretexts for attacks on himself, and on the policy he and Thiers were pursuing. Best to leave the majority, without further assistance on his part, to ponder the perils of a long delay in settling the ultimate form of the Government.

And they pondered to some purpose. When the Assembly met again on the 30th of November 1874, it was with a determination to do something; and by the 21st of January 1875, the new Constitution was in debate. Meanwhile there had been, as may be supposed, negotiations manifold and intricate between the various parties with regard to what they would and would not accept. Thiers had been indefatigable in his efforts to detach votes from the Right Centre. Gambetta had been no less busy in inducing his Radical friends to accept the distasteful features in the proposed Constitution—the creation of a Senate or Second Chamber, and the election of the President for

seven years. The result of these efforts was seen on the 30th January, when the decisive battle was fought. On that day the Assembly accepted, by a majority of one—353 votes to 352—the proposition of M. Wallon, which was to the following effect: "The President of the Repulic is elected by the Senate and Chamber of Deputies sitting together as a National Assembly. He is appointed for seven years. He can be re-elected." Here was the Republic definitely accepted, though by the narrowest of possible majorities, as the Government of the country; and as nothing succeeds like success, all went more merrily still in the debates on the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd of February. But on the 11th a hitch occurred. The question under discussion was the composition of the Senate, and the Left made the great mistake of following a Radical deputy who put forward the proposition, foolish in itself, and suicidal in the existing circumstances, that the Second Chamber should be elected by the same body of electors as the Chamber of Deputies. The Extreme Right and the Imperialist group, which did not want for astute parliamentary tacticians, saw their opportunity. They either abstained from voting at all, or voted for the proposition; and it was carried. The victory was one which the Left could well have spared. One more such and, like Pyrrhus, they would have been undone. On the next day, the 12th, the Right Centre declared that they would oppose the third reading of the bill on the composition of the Senate, aud the Prime Minister, M. de Cissey, read a message from Marshal MacMahon adumbrating that he would not ratify it. The third reading was accordingly refused by 368 votes to 345.

Here was a dilemma. Everything that had been

done seemed about to be undone. The Royalists and Imperialists were jubilant; the Republicans were in the highest state of exasperation. Forgetting how much they were themselves responsible for the result, they asked whether *this* was to be the outcome of the sacrifice of their oldest and most cherished convictions. M. Brisson made himself the mouth-piece of their anger, and at once proposed that the Assembly should be dissolved. Gambetta rose to speak on the question whether that proposition should be considered urgent. He was in superb "form." It was one of his great oratorical moments. An eye-and-ear witness* has described how he leapt, powerful, massive, like a bull for strength, to the tribune, and how his great voice trembled with indignation as he rolled forth his stormy periods, every now and again, when the interruptions accumulated, crashing through them as with the clap that follows the lightning-flash. A speech, like all great speeches, clearly to be heard, not read; and yet even now, with only the lifeless printed page before us, it is still possible—so full of fiery life are the speaker's words—to evoke the whole scene, the orator at the tribune, the hostile members finally almost awed into silence, the Republicans breaking into applause; and to hear once again the swift-winged words with which he brought home to his auditors the sacrifices he and his friends had made, and the indignation with which the country would learn how miserably it was being betrayed. "Hereafter," he told the majority in conclusion, "it will perhaps be said that you let slip the one opportunity of founding a Republic at once strong, lawful and law-abiding, and moderate."

* M. Camille Pelletan in *Le Théâtre de Versailles.*

The speech, we are told, made a profound impression on the Assembly. Conciliatory proposals were at once suggested. The constitution of the Senate again became the subject of negociations between the various groups. Finally the Right Centre, or such portion of it as were prepared to adopt the Republican cause, agreed with the Left Centre to accept a Senate partly nominated by the Assembly, and partly elected, but not by direct suffrage, in each district. From the Left and Extreme Left great opposition was anticipated; but, in a meeting held on the 21st of February, Gambetta, with his persuasive tongue, succeeded in nearly overcoming it. Only a very few of the purists of the party—M. Grévy among the number—held out; and finally, notwithstanding a last Bonapartist effort to sow dissension in the ranks of the coalition, the constitution of the Senate was settled on the 24th of February, by 448 votes to 210. On the following day the law regulating the functions and position of the Executive was also passed; and the Republic, after four years of debate and doubt, became the recognised legal form of Government in France.

This result—this great result—was due probably in a greater measure to Gambetta than to any other single man. He it was, who by his impassioned harangues, had kept alive and fanned the flame of Republicanism thoughout the country. He it was who, taking dexterous advantage of the proved impotence of the monarchical parties, had induced his own political friends, by a sudden change of front, to rush in and obtain the victory. No doubt there had been some playing with principle in the transaction. Public men do not veer round the political compass with impunity.

It can redound to no statesman's credit to say one day that an Assembly has no "constituent" powers, and that the establishment of a Senate is contrary to the rights of the people, and then to advocate the acceptance of a Constitution from that same Assembly, and a Constitution in which a Senate forms an important element. But at least the thing was done skilfully, and, one may add, patriotically. Gambetta entertained no manner of doubt that in the policy he pursued at this time he was serving the best interests of France. And how ably he defended that policy! His speech at Belleville on the 23rd of April is a model of popular eloquence—by turns impassioned, striking, ironical, almost playful, and perspicuously clear. It completely carried his audience away. Radicals as they were, they found themselves converted for the nonce to the doctrines of the yet unnamed Opportunism, and went away convinced that the Senate must be a particularly Democratic institution.

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CHAPTER VIII.

GAMBETTA FINALLY DEFEATS THE ANTI-REPUBLICAN COALITION.

1875—1877.

Gambetta's view of the task of the Republicans—Election of members for the Senate—Anti-Republicans defeated—Speech at Bordeaux on "Rocks ahead"—Elections go against the Ministry—M. Buffet resigns—Dufaure Prime Minister—Gambetta endeavours to abolish the divisions among the Republicans—Gambetta appointed President of the Committee on the Budget—He is urgent to obtain changes among the permanent officials—Clericalism—Dufaure resigns on the 1st of December 1876—His successor, M. Jules Simon, dismissed on the 16th of May 1877—The de Broglie-Fourtou Cabinet—Duel between that Cabinet and Gambetta—Dissolution of the Chamber—Efforts of the Ministry to secure a majority—Counter-efforts of Gambetta—Success of the Opposition—Resignation of the Ministry—The Chamber refuse to recognise their successors—Dufaure forms a Ministry—Republicans successful at last.

THOUGH the Republic had been definitely established on the 25th of February 1875, it must not be supposed that the Republicans were yet masters of the situation. The majority of the Assembly, when they chose to act in concert, were still a reactionary majority. The Ministry which came into being simultaneously with the new Constitution* was far from being, in Radical,

* The Ministry presided over by M. de Cissey, which held sway from the fall of M. de Broglie till the establishment of the Republic, had only been a "Ministry of Affairs."

or even Republican eyes, an ideal Ministry. Gambetta and his friends had still to keep their ardour in leash.

And for this Gambetta was quite prepared. In his speech of the 29th of March 1875, over the grave of Quinet, after referring to the differences between himself and Republicans of the older school, like Ledru Rollin and Quinet himself, he said :—

> My dear fellow citizens, it is not for mere purposes of enjoyment, after the fashion of despots, that democracy has assumed sovereignty in this country. With power have come the great duties and the difficulties of power. Being a majority, we must now govern, and show ourselves worthy of rule. And for this reason we must work, we must submit to discipline, we must cultivate a spirit of patience, of conciliation, of compromise. We must know how to ally prudence with strength. This is the task which necessarily devolves on those who would govern men for men ; are compounded of divers passions and interests, and the government, according to the principles of the French Revolution, is no more than the first servant of the people.

And again at Belleville, on the 23rd of April, he preached the same doctrine of prudence and moderation to the fiery democracy of the Parisian faubourgs.

So though, M. Buffet, Minister President and Minister of the Interior, might maintain in power a whole army of obnoxious anti-Republican officials, though he might make use of the powers conferred on him by the "state of siege" to harry the Republican press and interfere with Republican meetings—yet, notwithstanding every provocation, Gambetta kept silence for the most part even from good words. By dint of great efforts and sacrifices, a Republic had been established. Within a few months a Senate would have to be chosen. A General Election, however delayed, must take place sooner or later. Mean-

while patience, prudence, the avoidance of any agitation calculated to frighten the various reactionary groups back into cohesion—such continued to be his policy. Once only he seemed to depart from it, and that was on the 15th of July 1875, when M. Buffet had defended, or seemed to defend, the intrigues of the Imperialists. Then Gambetta rose in his wrath, and denounced both Imperialists and Minister with the old vehemence and in the old terms. But, except on this occasion, he kept mainly silent till the 4th of August when the Assembly adjourned; and he seems to have said no word during the recess.

The Assembly met again on the 4th of November, and were at once confronted with two or three very important questions. Among these was that burning question of *Scrutin d'Arrondissement* and *Scrutin de Liste* which has alternately smouldered and flamed so often in French politics. Gambetta spoke on it twice—once on the 11th, and again on the 26th of November—advocating the *Scrutin de Liste* most strenuously, on grounds which I shall have to discuss more fully. Suffice it to say here that for the nonce *Scrutin d'Arrondissement* prevailed.

But in the absence of an immediate prospect of a dissolution, there was a yet more burning question than this, the question, namely, of the choice of members for the Senate. That body was, according to the new Constitution, to consist of 300 members, of whom 75 were to be elected by the Assembly, and the remaining 225 by the departments and colonies. How would the Assembly exercise its powers? The pessimistic Radicals were in despair. Was it conceivable that the Reactionists, being in a majority, would not use their strength to rigidly exclude the Republicans and return

75 senators pledged to their way of thinking? Gambetta took a quite different view of the situation. He held that the majority would fall to pieces now, just as they had fallen to pieces when the settlement of the Constitution was in debate, and that, if the Left remained under discipline, victory was in their hands. The event proved that he had judged rightly. To the general surprise, when the first ballot was taken, on the 9th of December, only two men were found to have secured the "absolute majority" * requisite to give validity to their election; and of these two, one figured on the lists both of the Left and Right, and the other on the list of the Left only. Moreover the two chiefs of the Right Centre, M. Buffet and M. de Broglie, were relatively nowhere. Clearly though the Left had voted "straight" for the list drawn up by a committee consisting of Gambetta, M. Jules Ferry, M. Jules Simon and three others, the Right had voted anyhow, and given free rein to their divisions and jealousies. This was so apparent that disorganisation at once set in among their ranks. On the same evening M. de la Rochelle, the President of the Extreme Right, or ultra-Legitimist section, came to the delegates of the Left, and offered them fifteen votes on condition that they, in turn, would secure the nomination of the fifteen members so voting. The proposal was not one perhaps implying the highest political morality, for the parties to the coalition were bitterly opposed; but the Left accepted it gladly. The next day, amid the jibes and execrations of the majority, who were as bears robbed of their whelps, eleven Legitimists—four having refused to accept the unworthy compact—voted with the Left;

* *I.e.*, not only a larger number of votes than the other candidates, but a number equal to more than half the number of voters.

and the leaders of the Left, having thus secured the necessary "absolute majority," did henceforth pretty well what they liked with the elections—especially as they took stringent measures, of a doubtful legality, to secure that their followers voted "straight."

And now, at last, the dissolution of the Assembly was at hand, and an electoral period, in the widest sense, had begun. On the 15th of January "Senatorial delegates" were to be elected in the various communes, who, in turn, were to elect Senators on the 30th of January; and on the 20th of February there was to be a general election for the new Chamber.

At such a time Gambetta, as may be supposed, was not idle. He took a very active part in the Senatorial elections, contributing in Paris to the election of Victor Hugo, and of his own erewhile assistant during the war, M. de Freycinet, and he also visited Marseilles and Aix. Then, the Senatorial elections being over, he threw himself heart and soul into the battle of the elections for the Chamber. *Nec pluribus impar*, according to Louis XIV.'s arrogant motto, he undertook, in his own person, to contest no less than five seats, at Paris, Marseilles, Lille, Bordeaux, and Avignon. On the 2nd of February he spoke in Paris in favour of his faithful henchman, M. Spuller. On the 6th he spoke at Lille. On the 9th at Avignon. On the 13th at Bordeaux; on the 15th at Paris twice; and on the 17th at Cavaillon in the south, where the meeting was stormily interrupted, and stones were thrown at the orator as he left the hall in an open carriage. The staple materials in all these speeches, though varied with great art, were pretty well what one might have expected. There was something about the Empire, of course, and more about "Clericalism,"

which seems to have been the orator's special bugbear at this particular time. There were the usual demonstrations that the Republic was the sole government possible in France. There were denunciations of the permanent officials as being cankered with the reactionary spirit. Then, as against the Intransigeants who were opposing him at Marseilles in the person of M. Naquet, there were encomiums on the "policy of results" which had been leading the Republican party to victory. And mingled with all this were eloquent words of warning—words showing that Gambetta was not a mere windy orator, but that he had a statesman's foresight of the practical difficulties his party would have to face on the morrow of victory.

What I have to say, gentlemen [so he spoke at Bordeaux], is that that majority which is about to be created will have resolutely to face its future responsibilities. It will have to persevere in the policy of prudence, of circumspection, of firmness, which we have inaugurated. For I know of one thing fraught with greater danger to a party than either street insurrection, or Government threats, or the snares of those in power; and that one thing is the intoxication of success—the kind of madness that seizes on the victors in the hour of victory, and prevents them from taking into account obstacles, difficulties, prejudices—matters which, in the region of politics, have as much weight as truth itself—and lead them, all wild with the heady fumes of triumph, to hurry on the solution of every question. To do this now would be to compromise what we have done for the country at the cost of so much labour. The essential point at the present moment is that the election of the 20th of February, to which the country and the world are attentive, should have a meaning and significance at once definite, striking, unmistakable, and universal; so that it may be known that the country desires a Chamber truly and firmly republican, resolutely democratic, and passionately liberal; but, above all, a Chamber of practical politicians.

Don't allow yourselves to be cheated with words; don't think that politics are a game, and that they consist purely and simply in speechifying, and in the intrigues of the lobbies and committee-rooms

of the Chamber. No, these do not constitute politics. As thus understood, politics are only good for what I may call the play-actors of Parliament. But, let me tell you, there is not in the world any science or art—and politics possess the double character—which demands more unremitting labour, more knowledge acquired by observation, more persistent and continuous effort. Is there anything with which politics are not concerned? Is there anything into which politics do not enter? Is there any achieved progress, any reform in any branch of human activity, which may not necessitate a change in the methods, views, combinations, purposes, plans, and practical sphere of politics? Politics! Do you know when at last our politics will be good and efficient? I answer, when we shall have recognised that, in order to make them so, we have need of the fullest knowledge; and consequently that good and efficient politics can only be the result of immense toil and an immense devotion.

Brave words, good words—words which it were well if Gambetta himself had taken more effectually to heart at various times in his career, both before and after this; words which it were well for French Republicans to ponder now that their triumph seems occasionally in danger of passing once more into defeat.

The elections for the Senate throughout the country proved only relatively propitious to the Republican cause; and notwithstanding the preliminary advantage obtained by the Republicans in the Assembly, as already described, the majority of the Senators was "reactionary" in character. But in the elections for the Chamber, the success of the Republicans was striking and complete. Gambetta himself was elected by four out of the five constituencies to which he had offered himself as a candidate. M. Buffet, the Prime Minister, failed, on the other hand, to secure his election anywhere, and on the 23rd of February dissolved his Ministry and resigned.

At this stage it would have been in accordance with constitutional usage if Marshal MacMahon, the Pre-

sident of the Republic, had frankly entrusted the formation of the new Ministry to one of the foremost representatives of the Republican Left—either to Thiers, if Thiers would have accepted the office, or, failing Thiers, to Gambetta. But the Marshal, an entirely honest soldier, though in no sense a statesman, was genuinely convinced that the majority of the Left meant anarchy, and held it to be his own special mission to preserve the country from falling under their dominion. To travel any great distance in the direction of democracy, he was by no means prepared. So he entrusted the formation of the new Ministry, and that grudgingly, to Dufaure, and the Ministry thus formed belonged essentially to the Left Centre of the former Assembly.

Gambetta, meanwhile, had been using his best efforts to obtain a fusion of the whole Republican party, and to do away with the old division into separate and independent groups. The project was that of a statesman. Bitterly may one regret for France that it did not succeed. How much of Parliamentary weakness and discredit might not have been averted if there had been, both in the Senate and Chamber, a strong homogeneous party working on clear and distinct lines, not wasting its energies in internecine strife and profitless intrigue! Gambetta and his more immediate friends felt the coming danger acutely, and made, at this time, a strenuous attempt to meet it. Nor did it seem at the time, and for a short space, as if they would fail. The new members lent a willing ear to their arguments. On the 7th of March upwards of three hundred Republican senators and deputies met, and concord reigned. On the 12th they met again, and listened to a speech in which Gam-

betta preached patience in view of the disappointment caused by the constitution of the new Cabinet; and then, at his instance, they passed a general resolution, impressing on the Ministers the necessity of making short work with all reactionary permanent officials. This unanimity at once bore fruit. The Ministers, whether feeling that they had a strong compact majority behind them, or impelled forward against their own wish, immediately promised strong measures. And then, when the fusion of the groups seemed working so satisfactorily, disunion once more set in. By the 24th of March, the Left and Left Centre had formed themselves into separate bodies once more. The extreme Left alone, acting on Gambetta's advice, refused to follow their example. But the mischief was done, and henceforward irreparable.

It is not my purpose to accompany Gambetta through all the debates in which he took part during the next few months. On the 4th of April he was appointed President of the Commission on the Budget for the year 1877, and it need be no matter of surprise that he acquitted himself of the laborious duties of the office in a manner more than creditable. Six years before, in 1870, when occupying the position of Minister of the Interior after the fall of the Empire, he had impressed Mr. Washburn, the American Minister, by the "quickness of his perceptions, his executive ability, and his promptness of decision"; and these qualities stood him in good stead as a financial exponent and debater. But to make the details of French finance interesting to the English reader is, I fear, beyond my powers. I shall not attempt it. Neither shall I dwell upon Gambetta's speeches on army matters; on the law relating to the

nomination of mayors (11th and 12th of July 1876); on the partial amnesty to be proclaimed with respect to the men who had taken part in the insurrection of the Commune (3rd and 4th November); and on the right of the Senate to amend money bills (28th December). I shall not even summarise the able popular harangues with which once again, on the 27th of October 1876, he induced the sturdy Radicals of Belleville to accept the comparatively moderate doctrines of Opportunism.

But there are two points in his policy at this time that call, I think, for fuller comment. The first is his insistence upon the necessity of getting rid of the permanent officials—prefects, sub-prefects, and others—who had been appointed under preceding Governments. And here, perhaps, it may be necessary to explain, in his justification, or partial justification, that these "functionaries" occupy in France a very peculiar position, a position to which there is no analogy in English public life. On this side of the Channel, for instance, it matters not at all, when a general election takes place, what party may happen to be in power. Apart from the doubtful case of two or three dockyard constituencies, the influence which the Government, as such, can bring to bear upon the body of voters is infinitesimal. It has no official representatives in the counties, municipalities, or parishes. It has no patronage worth speaking about. It cannot by direct action make the life of the ordinary citizen happy or miserable. Speaking generally, one may say that the English elector, though he may be occasionally swayed by class interest, yet has no immediate personal interest in the result of an election. He expects nothing for himself from the

Government. But in France things are managed very differently. There a centralised "Administration" has its agents, great as well as small, in every department—almost in every parish. That Administration appoints M. le Préfet, who is relatively a well-paid official, and M. le Sous-Préfet, and so on; and these gentlemen possess, each in his degree, a good deal of power, and a good deal of patronage; and the patronage is the more valuable as a political engine because in France the desire to become a placeman is very general, and the hope of getting something out of the Government very great. Moreover, it is a well-recognised tradition of French public life that all these "functionaries" shall use their influence in favour of the "Ins," and to the greater confusion of the "Outs."

Therefore, we are not entitled to regard Gambetta as having been animated by a mere desire of vengeance when he clamoured so unceasingly for a change in the *personnel* of the permanent officials. He wished to take out of his opponents' hands a weapon which they had used against him unsparingly, and he wished, when they were once disarmed, to turn the weapon against themselves. That such a weapon existed at all—a weapon which lent itself so readily to a foul blow—was unquestionably a misfortune for France; just as, to drop my metaphor, it is unquestionable, too, that many of Gambetta's followers lusted to turn out the hostile officials from a a simple desire to occupy their places, and that shameless greed has done infinite harm to the Republic. But, when all is said, it can scarcely be urged that there was anything radically unfair in his contention that men deeply committed to anti-

Republican principles were not the right instruments with which to work Republican institutions. Where he failed was in not seeing how he was pandering to the rapacity of his party.

The other point which calls for remark in Gambetta's policy at this time is his attitude towards religion. That he was an "anti-clerical" goes almost without saying. Most foreign Liberals are so. They hate "clericalism" with an undying hate. They see its baleful influence everywhere; they habitually think of society as a victim to its poisonous exhalations; they regard it as a kind of "universal darkness" ready at any moment to "cover all." The "pale name of priest," if I may venture to use Thackeray's happy expression, seems always to stand between them and the sun. Did not M. Clémenceau assure us, quite solemnly and with an air of profound conviction, that General Boulanger's electoral successes in Paris—so notoriously a priest-ridden city—were due to clerical influence! Nor probably would the absurdity of this proposition have struck Gambetta. He shared all such anti-clerical feelings to the full, and was ready at any moment to give them a voice. Thus, on the 24th of March 1876, he impugned the validity of the election of the Comte de Mun, on the ground that the local clergy had exercised their influence to secure the return of that eloquent champion. On the 24th of November he hailed with delight a declaration of Prince Napoleon that it was owing to clerical influences that France had forfeited the support of Italy during the war of 1870.*

* He reinforced Prince Napoleon's words, and spoke of the "clerical fanaticism which animated the Spaniard who had been made Empress of the French."

On the 27th of October he spoke to the wild spirits of Belleville of the "one enemy," "overwhelming, ubiquitous, all-embracing," who was "enveloping them on all sides." On the 4th of May 1877, the question in debate being the congenial one of "Ultramontane intrigues," he took up the same parable at greater length, and fiercely denounced the "spirit of invasion and corruption" of the Jesuit "faction," asked "whether things had not come to that pass that the State was now an appanage of the Church," lamented over "the unchaining of the violent and revolutionary passions" of Catholicism, proclaimed that it was a rare thing when patriotism and Catholicism found a home in the same bosom, and finally hurled at his opponents this fulgurant peroration: "And I am only translating into words the deepest feelings of the French people when I say of Clericalism what my friend Peyrat once said of it, 'Clericalism! There is the enemy!'"

Clericalism, *the* enemy—the arch enemy against which France has to arm and keep on guard continually! Alas! it may well seem as if France had other enemies in this last quarter of the nineteenth century. No doubt it is true that the Roman Church has made mistakes in her dealings with French Democracy. To those who wish her well for her services to mankind, and love her, in spite of what is unlovable, for the treasures of goodness, and character, and genius that humanity during such long ages has poured into her lap—to such it must often appear strange and sad that she has so persistently allied herself on the Continent with decaying governments and dynasties too clearly passing away. Why has she acted thus? What has been the secret of her policy? Has she

prospered more under Bourbon rule than she prospers with the "free field and no favour" of the United States, or than she prospers here in England? If Lamennais, sixty years ago, advocated a change of front with undue violence, there have been more acceptable voices raised since in the same cause. Why has she not listened to them? Has she been animated by a spirit of routine; or, more worthily, of hesitation to break with the past; or, more worthily still, of doubt whether she could rightly ally herself with forces that might be making for social disintegration? All interesting questions. But, however we may answer them, this at least is certain, that nothing she has done or left undone, no fault that she has committed, can constitute her the one arch enemy in a country where pessimism and despair have such accredited advocates, and the goddess Lubricity such a multitude of worshippers—and where, above all, man's original, inherent, ineradicable bestiality is so powerfully affirmed, and his essential manhood so often denied. And if anyone feels inclined to doubt whether this is a matter on which an English critic can profitably form an opinion, why then it will be enough, in reply, to refer to the evidence of Gambetta's friend and follower, the veteran Republican, M. Challemel-Lacour. For M. Challemel-Lacour, speaking in the Senate on the 19th of December 1888, of the ills now afflicting France, condemned by implication the anti-clerical policy of his erewhile leader, and deplored the dissensions it had caused, and the angry hostility it had roused against the Republican form of government.

But in 1876 and 1877 Gambetta felt no such misgivings; though even then, if he had looked forward

with unprejudiced eye, there was much that "might" have "given him pause." M. Buffet had resigned at the end of February 1876. He had been succeeded on the 10th of March by Dufaure, who, after some months of weary battling with a reactionary President, a half-hostile Senate, and an unidisciplined Chamber, resigned, on the 1st of December, on the question of the amnesty to the Communists. On the 13th Dufaure was succeeded in turn, but with no change in the general composition of the Ministry, by M. Jules Simon, and for a time matters seemed going fairly well. The new Prime Minister was adroit, skilful in the use of his tongue, a man of moderation and conciliatory views. He might have seemed, indeed, the very "man of the situation," and able, if the task were in any wise possible, to allay the growing fears of the Marshal, reassure the Conservatives and Clericals, and, at the same time, keep the Liberal majority in good humour and under due restraint. But the task was not possible. The Liberals forced his hand. On the 4th of May 1877, after the debate in which Clericalism had been denounced as "the enemy," they compelled him, under pain of a parliamentary defeat, to accept an "order of the day," declaring that the "Ultramontane manifestations" endangered "the internal and external security of the country," and were "anti-patriotic," and "a flagrant violation of the laws of the State." Whereupon those who, watching the course of affairs at all narrowly, were anticipating a rupture between the Marshal and his ministers, must have felt with Modred that "the time was hard at hand."

M. Jules Simon, however—"good easy man"—seems to have had no misgivings, and went on for the

next few days humouring the Liberal majority. What was his surprise when, on the morning of the 16th of May, he received a letter from Marshal MacMahon intimating that he (Jules Simon) had clearly lost his authority with the Chamber, and adding, "it is inevitable that there should be some explanation between us; because, if I am not responsible, as you are, to Parliament, yet I have a responsibility towards France, and a responsibility which I must take very specially into account at the present moment." Such an attitude on the part of the President was, of course, unconstitutional. M. Jules Simon had not been defeated in the Chamber. He still commanded a majority; and it was, in fact, because he represented the opinions of the majority only too well that he had incurred the Marshal's disfavour. Nevertheless, in the face of censure so administered, there was no course open but resignation. M. Jules Simon had an interview with the President, in which the latter explained that he himself had been placed in power by the Conservatives, that he had gone to the extreme limit of possible concessions, and that he could not keep a Ministry which was being "towed along by M. Gambetta." The news spread like wild-fire, and created general consternation. At three o'clock a large meeting of the Left was held; and Gambetta urged, as he had urged a year before that the various groups should unite against the common enemy. At ten, the same night, a general meeting took place at the Grand Hotel. Gambetta opened the proceedings. He declared, truly enough, that the Marshal in his letter claimed to be the possessor of a personal authority, independent of Parliament; and he proposed a resolution to the effect that the majority of the Assembly would

only give their confidence to a ministry really "free in its actions, and resolved to govern according to Republican principles." The resolution was passed unanimously and without discussion. An immense crowd cheered the orator as he left the Hotel.

And so, once more, he stood in the forefront of the battle as the leader of an attacking force. He had certainly lost no time on the 16th of May. On the 17th he was again in the breach. When the Chamber met, the members were naturally eager to hear some official explanation of the reasons that had compelled the Ministry to resign. But there was only one minister present, and he refused to go into details. Whereupon Gambetta rose, not, of course, to appeal to the Ministry—there was really no Ministry to which an appeal could be addressed—but to appeal to the Marshal himself. He spoke with studied moderation. For the Marshal personally he had only words of respect. But the Marshal was ill-advised.

What we should say to the President of the Republic [he declared] is this: "You have been deceived, you have been advised to pursue an evil policy, and we, we . . . conjure you to return to the paths of constitutional truth, for in those paths alone can you and we ourselves walk securely." For, in truth, what do we ask? That the Constitution should be a reality, that the government of the country by the country—that government for which the French nation has been struggling for well nigh ninety years—should be loyally and really carried into effect. And we say to the President of the Republic, "No, there is no truth in that sentence which has been suggested to you by well-known advisers—that sentence in which you pretend that you have a responsibility lying outside your legal responsibility, a responsibility above the responsibility of Parliament, above the responsibility of your ministers, above the responsibility apportioned, determined, and limited by the Constitution. Those advisers are urging you to pursue a fatal course when they induce you to extend your responsibility beyond the protecting limits assigned to it by the Constitution of the 25th of February 1875; *they* are your real enemies; *they* are leading you to

your ruin." Ah! gentlemen, I wish to utter no word that shall even seem, in any degree, however slight, to cast a reflection on the high personality of the President of the Republic. But this at least I may be allowed to say, that if he has earned glory on the battle-field; if he has won honour in the country's defence by brilliant services rendered at the cost of his blood and at the risk of his life, yet most certainly his career, full as it is of heroic feats has not been devoted to the loving study of political combinations and the equilibrium of Parliaments, and that consequently he is, in a greater degree perhaps than any other chief ruler, exposed to the machinations of those who, taking advantage of his simple rectitude, induce him to endorse doctrines and theories of which they know much better than he the terrible effects and the immense difficulties. . . . Gentlemen, it is time to put an end to this situation, and it is for you to put an end to it by assuming an attitude at once firm and moderate. Ask, with the Constitution in your hands, and the Country at your back, ask whether we are to be governed by the Republican party, in all its shades, or whether, on the contrary, those men are to be brought back who have already been three or four times rejected by the popular voice, and whether, with their help, a dissolution is to be imposed upon us, and a new consultation of the wishes of France. For my own part, my choice is made, and the choice of France is made also. If a dissolution is decided on, we shall go back with confidence and no uncertainty to the country, which knows us well, which appreciates our services, which is thoroughly aware that it is not we who are disturbing the public peace at home and jeopardising it abroad.

The Chamber, in reply to these exhortations, reaffirmed, by a majority of 347 to 149, the resolution adopted the night before at the general meeting of the Left. The Marshal, on his side, replied in a different fashion. The same evening he appointed a new Ministry, in which M. de Broglie held the place of President of the Council, and M. de Fourtou the "portfolio" of "the Interior." Here was a new "Ministry of Battle" with a vengeance. There was evidently to be war to the knife. On the next day, the 18th, M. de Fourtou read a message from the President declaring that he had loyally made the

experiment of governing with a Ministry chosen from the Left, but in vain; and that if he was to go on in the same direction, he would have to

> appeal to the fraction of the Republican party which believes that the Republic cannot be consolidated without . . . a radical change in all our great institutions, administrative, judicial, financial, and military. [And he added, giving a side blow at Opportunism] Their programme is very well known. Those who profess it, are quite agreed as to the points which it contains. They only differ among themselves as to the means to be employed and the opportuneness of the time for its realisation. Whereas I [continued the Marshal] consider it opportune neither for to-day nor yet for to-morrow.

Then, notwithstanding the protests of the Left in general, and Gambetta in particular, the Chamber was declared to be adjourned for a month. Immediately on leaving the Versailles theatre the members of the Left betook themselves to the Hôtel des Réservoirs, and, after listening to another speech from the indefatigable Gambetta, issued a manifesto to the country in view of the dissolution which they foresaw to be imminent.

The Ministry at once, if we are to adopt the language of M. Reinach, embarked on "a policy of corruption and violence." In other words, they did what French political parties are all too fond of doing. They dismissed the officials appointed within the last few months, reappointed their own partisans, harried the hostile Press, and left no stone of intimidation and cajolery unturned for the purpose of influencing the electoral body. The Republicans, on the other hand, as may be supposed, were not idle. Reunited once more, they made common cause in the common peril. All the more weighty of their journals, the *Journal des Débats*, the *Temps*, vied with the lighter skirmishers of the Press in the fierceness of their attacks

on the Ministers. Thiers threw himself into the fight with the ardour of a boy, carrying back his memory the while—so it is said—to the days, long since gone by, when he had opposed M. de Polignac in 1830, and helped to drive Charles X. from the throne. But Gambetta was the soul of the campaign. The offices of his paper, the *République Française,* were as the head-quarters of the host, and in his own person he stinted neither pen-stroke nor tongue-stroke. On the 9th of June he was at Amiens, and on the 10th at Abbeville, preaching once more union, and resistance by legal means, and the odiousness of Clericalism and Imperialism. And on the 16th of June, when the Chamber met again, it seemed almost as if the whole debate resolved itself into a duel between him and the Ministry. M. de Fourtou attacked him sturdily, bringing up with great parliamentary skill his old radical and wild declarations to the Paris electors in 1869; and Gambetta, eluding the onslaught with equal skill, carried the war into the enemy's ranks, and, amid a running fire of insulting interruptions—M. Paul de Cassagnac being the chief offender—demonstrated the unconstitutional position of the Ministry, and prophesied that the country would condemn them with no uncertain voice. It was during this sitting—a sitting memorable even among the annals of French Assemblies for rowdyism and offensive turbulence *—that an incident occurred of a particularly striking and dramatic character. M. de

* It is said that on this occasion even M. Rouher was ashamed of his followers and allies, and cried sadly: "They are disgracing the party! they are ruining us!" Mr. Washburn, who was present during the debate, says that Gambetta's "bearing" amid the cat-calls, mocking imitations, and insults "was magnificent."

Fourtou, speaking of the Assembly of 1871, took occasion to say that it had delivered the country from the presence of the Prussians. Whereupon Gambetta, who stood listening to the speech, lifted an indignant voice and pointed to Thiers, crying, "There sits the liberator of the country!" and the whole Left, springing to their feet as one man, gave to the fine old statesman round on round of applause.

According to the Constitution, the President could only dissolve with the concurrence of the Senate. But the Conservative groups had a majority in that body and, moreover, it was difficult for the Senate to refuse the President's request, as he threatened to resign if not allowed to appeal to the country. So on the 22nd of June the needed powers were given by a majority of 149 to 130; and on the 25th, the Chamber, having voted the necessary supplies, held their last meeting.

It is scarcely necessary to follow Gambetta step by step through the electoral campaign of the next few weeks. The situation being given, the reader will have no difficulty in imagining what were the arguments he addressed to the constituencies, and how he mingled truth and error, good sense and exaggeration, in his speeches and newspaper articles. At one moment he would be demonstrating, quite truly, that the new Ministry had embarked upon unconstitutional courses, and were abusing their power in an infinity of ways; at another he would be absurdly inveighing against them as a Government of priests, and declaring that they were about to precipitate the country into a war with Italy on behalf of the temporal power of the Pope. The Ministry, meanwhile, were doing their best, after their own fashion, to influence the consti-

tuencies. Notwithstanding all Gambetta's allegations, there seems little reason to doubt that neither M. de Broglie nor M. de Fourtou had been privy to the President's intention of dismissing M. Jules Simon, or had done anything to bring about that consummation. There seems every reason to believe, on the contrary, that both these politicians considered that the President, in resorting to extreme measures, had shown his hand prematurely, and that he ought to have waited till the Chamber had fallen into discredit through its own internal dissensions. But the war having been declared, they set to work, as I have said, to carry it on in the approved fashion. They gagged the Liberal press by prosecutions and prohibitions of sale. They dismissed Liberal officials. They used and abused every Government influence. Unfortunately, however, there was one thing wanting among their followers, and that was discipline. As the coalition had fallen to pieces in 1873, and again in 1875, so it fell to pieces now. Neither Legitimists nor Orleanists had experience and skill in the manipulation of elections. Consequently the Imperialists came very much to the front, and this their rivals could ill brook. Dissensions set in, and in some of the districts the Conservative interest was divided. The Republicans, on the contrary, marched forward as one man. They had set their hearts on sending back to the Chamber the identical 363 members who had voted against the new Government on the 19th of June. To do this they sank all minor differences. No Republican stood against another Republican in that election.

One incident in the campaign deserves, however, to be commemorated. Gambetta possessed in perfection a gift which Taper and Tadpole would have

envied—the gift of hitting upon an effective popular "cry." It was he who had minted the phrase of an "irreconcilable opposition" to the Empire. It was he, again, who had dubbed Clericalism "the enemy," and described the Government as a "Government of priests." And now, on the 15th of August 1877, he wound up a great speech at Lille with this declaration: "Believe me, gentlemen, when France has once spoken with her sovereign voice, then there will be nothing left but submission or resignation." *Se soumettre ou se démettre*—the jingle caught the popular ear at once. Here were, indeed, winged words to fly hither and thither throughout France. The confidence of the speaker grew contagious, and his "cry" found an echo everywhere. The Government rose in wrath. They would prosecute the *République Française*, Gambetta's paper, for reproducing such audacious sentiments. Gambetta was cited to appear before the 10th Chamber on the 11th of September, and condemned in default, together with the manager of the paper, to a fine of 2,000 francs, with costs, and three months' imprisonment. He appealed on a technical point, and was non-suited on the 22nd of September, and then appealed again. But, before this second appeal came on for hearing, the Broglie-Fourtou Ministry had become a thing of the past, and the prosecution was allowed to drop.*

For during all this time the elections had been approaching. They had been thrown back by the Government to the utmost limit allowed by the law, and even beyond; but still they could not be post-

* He had been condemned again, on the 12th of October, to three months' imprisonment and a fine of 4,000 francs, for an analogous offence.

poned indefinitely. On the 14th of October they took place. The result was scarcely what either party could have desired. Though the Republicans retained a good strong working majority, they were far from having triumphed all along the line, for they had lost some fifty votes. The Government, on the other hand, notwithstanding all their efforts, and the fifty votes which they had gained, were still hopelessly outnumbered. Nor, as may be supposed, were the majority in any mood of forbearance. It is the curse of such weapons of political warfare as had been adopted by M. de Broglie and M. de Fourtou that their recoil is so terrible. *Væ victis!* was the cry of the conquering Republicans. One of the first acts of the new Chamber which met at Versailles on the 7th of November, was to appoint a committee of thirty-three members to inquire into the validity of the election of the Government candidates. No doubt there had been administrative pressure in many of those elections—perhaps in most. But very certainly the majority were not in that judicial frame of mind which would bode well for the impartiality of their investigations. Vainly, as may be supposed, did M. de Broglie and M. de Fourtou strive to stem the torrent. Vainly did they appeal to the Senate. By the 23rd of November a new Ministry, a colourless "Ministry of Affairs," ruled in their stead, and for the next few weeks, months indeed, the invalidation of the elections of the members of the Right went on quite merrily.*

The new Ministry had but a short shrift. On the day after it had been appointed the Assembly resolved, by a majority of 315 to 204, to have absolutely nothing

* Over eighty elections were thus declared null.

to do with it. Here was a Governmental crisis indeed. The President swayed hither and thither and knew not what to do. He had all the soldier's feeling of being at his post in the hour of danger, and so would not resign. He could not bring himself to place power in the hands of the Republican Left, for he regarded the Radicals as the mere enemies of public order. He soon ascertained that the Senate had no mind to give him authority to dissolve the Chamber and appeal to the country once more. As an entirely honourable and upright gentleman, the thought of any resort to armed illegalities was odious to him. He was evidently in sore straits. And the Chamber ignorant of what his next move might be, felt that they could not with prudence divest themselves of the power of the purse. On the 4th of December, at the instigation of Gambetta, who had again been elected President of the Commission of the Budget, they refused to vote the supplies. The situation was becoming intolerable. At last, sadly and in bitterness of spirit, Marshal MacMahon gave way. Of the miserable alternatives placed before him by Gambetta, he chose the one which to himself was probably the more miserable: he did not resign, but he submitted. On the 13th of December he once again accepted a Ministry chosen from among the moderate Left, with Dufaure for Prime Minister. "He is wise, religious, and upright," said the President, speaking a little ruefully, perhaps, of his new Prime Minister, "and I know that he will not lead me into any disastrous policy. I can therefore remain at my post as long as he remains with me; but the day he goes I shall certainly go too."

So at last, after seven long years of weary battling and hope deferred, the Republicans were masters

of the situation. True, no doubt, that of the great constitutional powers in the State, two, the President and the Senate, were still to a large extent animated by a spirit of reaction. But the President's weapons had effectually been blunted, and the Senate was subject to partial re-election in the beginning of 1879, when the Republican majority in the country, assuming that they held together, would be able to "republicanise" it thoroughly. Thus the Republican Chamber had before them a fair field. Now was the time for the party to show what faculty of government there was in them. They had, under every previous form of rule, evinced a particular aptitude for criticism. Would they do so very much better than their opponents now that their own turn had come? That was the question of the future, at the end of the year, 1877, in France; and the future, so far, can scarcely be said to have answered it in a very favourable manner. As of old, so it is still: a man's worst foes are for the most part those of his own household.

CHAPTER IX.

PRE-EMINENCE, PREMIERSHIP, AND FALL.

1877-1882.

Gambetta the foremost man in France—Something large about him—He should then have been made Prime Minister—Invalidation of elections—New election for Senate—Speech at Romans—His political programme—Resignation of Dufaure and end of Marshal MacMahon's presidentship—Election of M. Grévy—Gambetta, on 1st February 1879, elected President of Chamber—M. Waddington's Cabinet falls to pieces—Gambetta repudiates the accusation of exercising an occult influence—Everything contributes to thrust power upon him—*Scrutin de Liste*—Gambetta its passionate advocate—Voted by the Chamber but rejected by the Senate—Meeting at Belleville refuses to listen to him—Fall of M. Ferry's Ministry on the 9th of November 1881—Gambetta at last called to power—His Ministry—He brings forward the question of *Scrutin de Liste*—Is defeated thereon—Did he court defeat?—His foreign policy—His house at Ville-d'Avray—Is wounded in the hand—Becomes severely ill—Dies on the 31st December 1882—Immense sensation caused by his death.

At the beginning of the year 1878, the point which we have now reached, Gambetta was, without question, the foremost politician in France. It was his strategy that had led the Republicans to victory through the parliamentary campaigns of the last five years. It was his eloquence that had rallied the country to the Republican cause, and brought together the majorities

which in election after election had overwhelmed the monarchical candidates. Whether as a debater or as a platform orator, he stood without a peer. Moreover, with the efflux of time his policy and actions during the war had come to be regarded in truer perspective and a juster light. France now felt that she owed a meed of honour to the man who had not despaired of her courage and fortunes, even in the darkest hour of her adversity. She had a kind of consciousness that here was a politician who was not quite as other politicians — excellent administrators perhaps, efficient speakers and debaters very probably, adequate as one might hope for the conduct of the country's affairs under normal conditions, but still ordinary politicians after all. In him there was the indescribable something which is not ordinary. He was unmistakably a man of génius, and, in virtue of that quality, stood, like Saul, towering by a head and shoulders over his fellows.

And, in truth, whether one agrees with the man's politics, or whether one does not, it is scarcely possible, I think, to avoid feeling towards him a kind of sympathetic admiration. There is something about him that is large, genial, generous. No one could hit harder. No one probably ever felt a keener delight in the strife of words, a wilder Berserker rage of battle. When the orator fury was on him, he lashed out with a terrible force. But the conflict once over, he bore from it no bitter memories. The blows he had himself received left no rankling wounds. Many had assailed him in the days after the war. He had spilt the country's blood like water, they said; he had squandered her treasure in useless braggadocio. Among the men who had thus mis-said him, was M.

Daudet, and a natural estrangement had sprung up between the two.* But some little time after, a friend of Gambetta was surprised to find that he was again on cordial terms with the novelist. "What, have you forgiven him?" the friend asked. "Whom have I not forgiven?" answered Gambetta. "Whom have I not forgiven?" One can almost imagine the shrug of the large shoulders accompanying the words —words eloquent of the tolerance of a great nature in which there was no place for petty vanity. What was an attack purely personal to himself that he should brood over or remember it? So, again, no one had assailed him with greater violence—one may even say with more insolence of invective—than M. Paul de Cassagnac. Nevertheless, when M. de Cassagnac's father, M. Granier de Cassagnac, died, Gambetta, being then President of the Chamber, found gracious terms in which to speak of the dead.†

All this, however, is in some measure a digression. To return to the position which Gambetta held in the beginning of 1878. He was then the recognised chief of a successful party, and there can be no question that, according to the usual traditions of Constitutionalism, he should have been called to take a responsible part in the administration of the country's affairs. Nor, if Thiers had lived, does it seem at all improbable that the great popular tribune would now have been made Prime Minister. For this was what Thiers was meditating when death struck him down in

* M. Daudet has long since published his palinode for his offensive article. He has also declared most positively that in the character of Numa Roumestan he had not intended to portray Gambetta.

† M. Granier de Cassagnac had also been entirely opposed to Gambetta in politics.

the midst of the electoral battle, on the 3rd of the previous September.* But the idea, however natural, was too startling to find a place in Marshal MacMahon's brain. The latter, as we have seen, had only been brought with great difficulty to accept Dufaure, and beyond Dufaure he would not go. Thus Gambetta was placed, not, as it is only just to observe, by his own act, in the anomalous position of being the most influential politician in France, and yet without open and avowed place either in the Ministry or the Opposition.

At first he seems to have made the most laudable resolves, and preached moderation in persuasive tones. He had been to Rome during the last days of 1877—a journey which fluttered the quidnuncs of the time not a little—and on his way back addressed a small meeting at Marseilles on the 7th of January 1878. He there spoke of the special perils that dog success, reminded his hearers that even in earlier days he had declared himself to be a "man of government, not of opposition," and exhorted them to remember the coming elections for the Senate, and meanwhile to pursue reasonable ends by reasonable means. But, alas! the circumstances were such as rendered the exercise of reason very difficult, and neither Gambetta's past nor his temperament fitted him particularly well to be its apostle. The Republican party, exasperated by the treatment that they had received since the 16th of the previous May, had come back to power breathing vengeance. They soon began to make short work with the officials appointed under the previous *régime*, and to invalidate the elections of the minority in a very wholesale way. Gambetta had always advocated the

* Thiers himself expected to replace Marshal MacMahon as President of the Republic.

first measure very strongly, and one can but regret to see how entirely he failed to appreciate that the second was, in the highest and best sense, impolitic. To appease, as far as might be, the passions of the past, and by magnanimity to disarm the opposition in the constituencies—these should clearly have been the objects of a party aspiring to become a national government. Gambetta, however, as I have said, did not take this view. On the 21st and 26th of January, he was defending the invalidation of the elections, and on the 1st of February, again *à propos* of an invalidated election, he launched at Rouher one of the most scathing and terrible of his denunciations of the Empire.

All, as it seems to me, a mistake. Gambetta and his friends were in no fit state to exercise delicate judicial functions, and the time had gone by when abuse of the Empire could do anything but inflame political passions which all who loved their country should have desired to appease. Nor, as regards this special victory over the Imperialists, can I forbear to say that it was rendered almost odious by the circumstances accompanying it. For when the torrent of Gambetta's invective had ceased, the undaunted Rouher, who never wanted for parliamentary courage, pleaded earnestly, passionately, with tears of indignation in his voice, for the bare justice of a hearing in reply, and was ruthlessly silenced with the closure. Rouher as a politician merits little sympathy. But the party that could gag an opponent under attack was not working for its own future.

Gambetta, however, to do him justice, was not always in such aggressive moods, and in his speeches between the 1st of February and the 18th of September there is little that calls for animadversion, com-

ment, or even mention—save perhaps his declaration that he "had a sufficiently free spirit to be at once a worshipper of Joan of Arc and the admirer and disciple of Voltaire." But on the 18th of September he spoke out again in somewhat of his old manner. According to the Constitution, a batch of senators had to retire in the following January, and on the 27th of October the delegates were to be elected who, in turn, were to elect the new senators. The occasion was, of course, important, for if the Republicans succeeded in carrying these respective elections, they would obtain a working majority in the Senate, and the entire government of the country would be practically in their hands. Gambetta travelled into the south-east provinces for the purpose of supporting the good cause, and on the 18th of September found himself at Romans, where he was received with all due enthusiasm. There he made a great speech—a speech moderate in parts, as when he said that, so far as he himself was concerned, he did not think the time had come for altering the Constitution, and also that he hoped Marshal MacMahon would remain in office for the full term of the Presidentship; but not so moderate when he came to deal with the reforms to be effected in the *personnel* of the army and magistracy, with the overwhelming evils of "clericalism," with the "laicisation" of education, and with monastic institutions—which last he described as constituting the one great "social peril."

It has been said, I know not how truly, that Gambetta came to regret his speech at Romans almost as soon as he had uttered it. And, in truth, his position at this time, however superb and seemingly commanding, was both delicate and difficult. He had entered

public life as an ardent Radical, and, so far as ultimate desirability was concerned, had never ceased to advocate the extreme measures set forth in the Radical programme. The divergence between himself, as an *Opportunist,* and the party of the *Intransigeants* did not, in one sense, affect any matter of vital principle. He professed to desire the same things that they did,* to have in view the same goal, and only to differ as to paths and speed of progression. Thus he had been enabled to keep the great Radical forces in the country under strict discipline and in leash. The Radicals had trusted that he would let them slip—perhaps even (who knows?) "cry havoc"—as soon as the right moment had come, and in that hope had forborne for the most part to snap at his restraining hand. And now the promised day seemed to be dawning. The Republicans had a majority in the Chamber. They would soon have a majority in the Senate. The Marshal was disarmed, and must either accept such measures as were put before him, or resign. Was patience still necessary, the eager and restless Radicals began to inquire; and, with that suspiciousness which is their curse, they also began to ask, Are we not being betrayed?†

* Their immediate programme at this time has thus been summarised: The suppression of the Catholic universities; free non-religious and compulsory education; the suppression of non-authorised religious bodies; the proclamation of an amnesty for the Communists of 1871; the impeachment of the Ministers of the 16th of May; and, of course, a wholesale dismissal of judges, public functionaries, and generals, whose antecedents were not Republican. But all this was only an instalment. The impeachment of the Ministry of the 16th of May Gambetta, however, did not want.

† This view of Gambetta's position and influence is stated with great force in some papers by M. Louis Pauliat, entitled "La Situation républicaine," in *La Nouvelle Revue* for 1883.

Thus Gambetta was placed, as I have said, in a position of considerable difficulty. That he had definitely, in his own mind, abandoned the old Radical programme as a whole, I certainly do not believe. There is no evidence of it. A traitor to the Radical cause in that sense, he certainly was not. But with "the years that bring the philosophic mind," with the manifold experiences of an active political life, he had come to see that all change in human affairs, to be effective and durable, must be of gradual development, and, to quote Wordsworth again, be "produced too slowly ever to decay." Thus, in this very speech at Romans, he had said—

> Let us look our position straight in the face. What do we really want? Ah! I know that we shall have to lay our hands to a great many things; but let us not do so like children, or like men rash and inconsiderate, or like utopians. I am the determined enemy of all attempts to make a clean sweep of every existing institution, and I am the enemy too of all abuses; but I desire that account should be taken of time, of tradition, and even of prejudices, for they most certainly exist—they are a power, and it is our duty, not indeed to respect, but to study them, so that they may be dissipated and disappear; and this result can only be attained if we act without passion and without violence.

But to preach moderation and delay, and yet retain a hold on the forces of revolution, that was a task beyond the strength even of a Gambetta, just as it had been beyond the strength even of a Mirabeau. The attempt, however, may serve to explain much that seems disproportionate and almost contradictory in his utterances at various times. His heart was with the Radicals, and yet as a practical politician he foresaw that they would ruin the Republican cause—which, indeed, has nearly come to pass—by undue haste; and at the same time he knew—which also came to pass—that if

he forbore to cry forward, they would leave him behind as a laggard, and cast stones at him as a traitor. So he was torn this way and that, supporting Dufaure's ministry both in private and in public, and yet now and again embarrassing it by such utterances as those at Romans.

Thus the year 1878 wore away. On the 27th of October the Municipal Councils elected their delegates in view of the senatorial appointments, and there was little doubt, from the character of the delegates chosen, that the result would be a strong addition to the Republican strength. On the 21st of November Gambetta fought a duel—pistols, and neither wounded—with M. de Fourtou, one of whose parliamentary statements he had publicly stigmatised as "a lie." On the 24th of December he delivered to the Commercial Travellers a public address in which he disclaimed all personal ambition, and again preached moderation. On the 4th of January 1879 he donned his advocate's gown once more, for the first time since 1869, to plead the cause of his friend M. Challemel-Lacour, who had been ignobly libelled. And on the following day, the 5th of January, the return of sixty-six Republican members to the Senate at last gave the Republicans a majority in that Assembly, and placed full parliamentary power in their hands.

Neither Dufaure's ministry nor Marshal MacMahon's presidentship outlived the last event by many days. The Radicals were not to be baulked. They were eager for the spoils. The two Houses met on the 14th of January. On the 16th the Ministry submitted its programme of desirable reforms. On the 20th they obtained a kind of vote of confidence, though, as a matter of course, the Radicals regarded

their programme as miserably insufficient. And on the 30th, the Marshal, utterly sick of signing decrees of dismissal, and finally refusing to be the means of depriving the country of the services of some of her best generals, resigned his post as President of the Republic. The Ministry of Dufaure came to an end at the same time.

What was the precise part played by Gambetta at this crisis remains very obscure. He seems to have absented himself from Paris from the 17th to the 20th of January. He did not speak in the debate on the policy of the Ministry; he abstained from voting in the final division. But with the 30th of January his course of action, on one point at least, though only on one, becomes perfectly clear. There is every reason to believe that he might, had he so willed it, have successfully contested the Presidency of the Republic. But he at once postponed his claims to those of M. Grévy, as he had done on the 9th of October 1877,* during the great disarray of the party following on Thiers' death; and M. Grévy was elected. Here, however, we again fall into doubt and obscurity. The time has not arrived when the history of the relations between the new President and Gambetta, both now and also during the period of the latter's Ministry, can be definitely written. According to M. Reinach, Gambetta's enthusiastic follower and disciple, M. Grévy, should at once have called on Gambetta to take office; and M. Reinach not only supports his view by an unexceptionable array of constitutional argument, but says also that Gambetta had placed his services at M. Grévy's

* See his speech of that date at the Cirque du Château d'Eau.

disposal, and that it was wholly M. Grévy's fault that the great party leader, instead of stepping into his legitimate position as Premier, was relegated to the Presidency of the Chamber, a position of comparative aloofness from the strife of parties.

His election to that post, on the 1st of February 1879, was not unanimous, but he obtained 338 votes out of the 407 votes recorded, a quite sufficient majority, and on the 6th of February took possession of the Presidential arm-chair, and delivered a short address, in which, after paying a graceful compliment to his predecessor, M. Grévy, he went on to say :—

Elected by the Republican majority, and the firm guardian of your prerogatives, I know what is my duty as the protector of the minority ; and I hope to be able to ally that duty unfalteringly with the duty of maintaining the respect which everybody here is bound to show for the Constitution and for the established authority of the Republic. We can, we ought to feel, one and all, that the days of battle are passed. Our Republic, after emerging victorious from the *mêlée* of parties, must now begin to create and organise. Accordingly, gentlemen, I would invite you especially to concentrate your zeal, your lights, your talents, all your efforts, upon those great scholastic, military, financial, industrial, and economic questions which have been brought to your notice, and of which the younger generations, the army, the workers, the producers, the nation in short, have a right to expect a solution.

Whereupon he withdrew to the Presidential heights, like one of the gods of old to the summit of Olympus, and for the next few months took no ostensible and acknowledged part in the parliamentary battle.

The Chamber still sat at Versailles ; but Gambetta immediately took up his official residence at the Palais-Bourbon in Paris, much to the scandal of the Right, who continued to regard the capital as a doubtful home for an independent parliament. It was some time since he had left the apartment in the Rue

Montaigne, and gone to reside in rooms of greater dignity, though still much on the hither side of magnificence, under the same roof as the offices of his paper, the *République Française*. And now at the Palais-Bourbon he naturally lived as the President of a great Assembly should, though certainly without exaggerating in any way the pomp and circumstance that fittingly attend high office. Nevertheless the extreme Radicals hated him the more that he did not cultivate a Spartan simplicity. They represented him as a kind of Roman Emperor, bathing in a bath of silver, and faring sumptuously every day. This was what Opportunism meant, they declared; it meant playing on the people's credulity by the profession of high-sounding sentiments, and then, when the time came for realising the people's legitimate hopes, retiring to a life of luxury and sloth. For all his eloquent plausibilities, he was, so they declared in bitterness, one "lost leader" the more.

Gambetta meanwhile was showing himself a very efficient President of the Chamber. To set a thief to catch a thief, or turn a poacher into a game-keeper, has always been considered a cunning piece of strategy; and it must be owned that in appointing Gambetta to keep order over unruly and turbulent members, the majority were pursuing a policy of a somewhat similar kind. And it proved successful. The members of the Right, when under rebuke, might now and again take occasion to remind him of his own interruptions in former days; but, on the whole, they felt they were in the presence of a strong man, not to be trifled with, and a man, moreover, who, though a partisan, had a sense of justice and of the dignity of his office. So they, for the most part, accepted his

ruling; and in the thankless and difficult task of working the parliamentary system in the face of men whose great aim was to bring that system into contempt, he may be said to have done well.

Thus the months passed. The Chamber of Deputies held its last meeting at Versailles on the 2nd of August 1879, and reassembled in Paris on the 27th of November. At the end of the year M. Waddington's Cabinet fell to pieces, and on the 28th of December another was formed under the presidency of M. de Freycinet. A fortnight afterwards, on the 11th of January 1880, Gambetta was re-elected President of the Chamber, but—which was an ominous sign—by only 289 votes out of 308 recorded. On the 21st of June he descended once more into the political arena, and delivered a great speech in the Chamber in favour of extending a complete amnesty to all persons implicated in the insurrection of the Commune. A little later, on the 8th, 9th, and 10th of August, he was at Cherbourg, in company with M. Grévy, the President of the Republic, and M. Léon Say, the President of the Senate—three Presidents—and was there received with all due enthusiasm. On the 19th of September M. de Freycinet in turn resigned the Premiership, being accused of truckling to the Clericals; and two days afterwards M. Jules Ferry reigned in his stead. On the 20th of January 1881, Gambetta was for a third time elected President of the Chamber, but by the still diminishing majority of 262 votes out of 376 recorded. And on the 21st of February 1881 he once more left the Presidential arm-chair to make a great speech on foreign affairs.

But here it is fitting that I should pause in the cataloguing of events, for this speech of the 21st of

February 1881 is significant, and has a distinct biographical value.

Gentlemen [the orator said in his exordium], Gentlemen, it is now a long time since people began to accumulate against the man who stands before you legend upon legend, fable upon fable, and calumny upon calumny. I have never sought for any opportunity of dispelling all these falsehoods, because they nearly always had relation only to home affairs, and there really did not seem to be any use in brushing them aside. But since an attempt is now made to show that the part I am supposed to play, and the influence attributed to me, have a distinct relation to foreign policy—that is, have a distinct relation to matters with regard to which it would be criminal to do anything that might cause an injury to France—I feel that I owe an explanation to my colleagues, just as I owe the truth to my country. Well, gentlemen, I ask you to believe, in spite of all you may have read in the newspapers of every shade with regard to specific acts of alleged intervention or occult interference on my part—I ask you to believe, for I affirm it boldly and without the slightest fear of being contradicted either by the Ministers now before you, whom you profess not to regard as free agents, or by the members of former ministries, who, as one may at least suppose, have recovered their liberty, that never, at any time, or in any manner, have I intervened—I do not say to advise, for I had no right to advise; the mandate which I hold gives me no such right—but to influence, were it ever so slightly, their opinions and their decisions. I imagine that everyone here is really in possession of perfect freedom. Well, I defy any Minister, any French agent, whether at home or abroad, whether now present in Paris or absent on duty, to come here and say that at any time, at any moment, I have given him either instructions or powers; I defy any one of them to come here and say that there ever was any occult Cabinet, or occult policy—which must necessarily be an anti-national policy, —existing side by side with the policy of the Republic. Gentlemen, I speak with warmth, because I have long restrained my emotion at knowing that my every intention, my every act, was calumniated. I am here to take my full share of responsibility as a deputy, whether in my place or at this tribune. On the day when I am called to play another part, I shall, be assured, still claim my full share of responsibility; but till then my first duty is to allow full and free action to others, and that I have always done.

"Calumnies! why, they are our daily bread," said Madame de Maintenon to some lady who had come to

her to complain of a false accusation; and in the pride of place which Gambetta had now reached calumnies were heaped upon him without stint. If the Ministry committed a fault, it was laid to his charge. If they were turned out of office, their fall was attributed to his machinations. His most innocent words of patriotic encouragement—such as those uttered in one of the speeches at Cherbourg—were travestied into declarations of war. Nor did these attacks come only from the members of the old monarchical parties, Legitimists, Orleanists, and Imperialists—the last of whom especially had no cause to treat him with forbearance. The *Intransigeants* of the extreme Left were equally virulent. M. Clêmenceau, the leader of the party in the Chamber, openly accused him * of trying to bring back personal government, and aiming at a dictatorship of intrigue. M. Rochefort, whose forte is not gratitude, bespattered him with abuse, called him a "wretch," a "grocer's son," and conveniently forgot that in the bad days of 1871 Gambetta had tried to save him from the consequences of his misdeeds, and had afterwards subscribed money so that he might escape from the convict settlement of Nouméa.

Gambetta, not being a sick lion, but a lion in very full health and vigour, bore all such kicks with a quite sufficient equanimity. Still he must have felt increasingly the difficulties and anomalies of his own position. He had probably no wish to be called to power. With a statesman's judgment he appreciated the confusion into which French politics had fallen on the morrow of the victory over the reactionary Ministry of the 16th May 1877—the factiousness, the impracticability, the impossibility of founding a strong and

* In October 1880.

stable government. With unerring foresight he saw that these troubles would thicken in the future, as, indeed, they have done, and that the causes dear to his heart would be in danger of suffering eclipse, if not of being irretrievably lost. He knew how quickly, in such a hot-bed of parliamentary intrigue as the French Chambers, politicians are forced into prominence, and then cast aside like withered weeds. He knew that he deserved better than such a fate, that in the evil days to come he might yet do the State some service. Therefore his interest was now, as it had been since the death of Thiers, to keep his position as the coming man, to hold himself in reserve for the country's greater need.

But, as the days went on, it must have become more and more clear to him that this could not be, and that, within a very short time, the failure of successive Ministries, the attacks of his enemies, the hopes of his friends, the necessities of the situation, would compel him to assume the reins of power. Then he cast about to see how best his hand could be strengthened for the coming task. What France required was a strong government, deriving its power from a Chamber not split into factions, but acting on large party lines. How should this be secured? Clearly, he argued, by altering the character of the electorate. To tamper with the suffrage was impossible. Universal Suffrage was a pet national institution and not to be impugned. Moreover, it was one of Gambetta's fetishes, and he would in no case have thought of touching it with a sacrilegious hand. But in the history of French politics there were two methods of election which had prevailed alternately. These were the *Scrutin d'Arrondissement* and the *Scrutin de Liste.*

By the former, which was then in force, each member was elected, on much the same system as prevails here in England, by a circumscribed constituency returning one member, and one member alone. By the *Scrutin de Liste*, on the other hand, each Department returned so many members—as if, to take an instance, sixty members were assigned to Middlesex, and each elector voted for the county generally, and could vote for sixty candidates. Here was the change which Gambetta wanted for his purpose. He would do away with the existing *Scrutin d'Arrondissement*, with its subjection to local influences and petty diversities of interest. He would go back to the *Scrutin de Liste* under which the constituencies would vote, presumably, on larger issues, and in view of interests more purely national, and under which, above all, the electors would be able to concentrate their votes on one candidate in such a manner as to give him an almost limitless personal authority.

Of course the question had a history. So far as precedent went, *Scrutin de Liste* was decidedly in accordance with Republican traditions. It was under that system that the Republican Assemblies had been elected in 1848, 1849, and 1871; and the change to *Scrutin d'Arrondissement* in 1875, combated by Gambetta at the time, had been largely effected under reactionary influences. In 1880 the question was again brought forward for discussion by M. Bardoux, an Opportunist deputy and friend of Gambetta. It at once divided the country in a marked manner. The floodgates of hostility to Gambetta were unloosed. There seemed every reason to fear that the issue would be decided—just as it has more recently been decided under the panic caused by General Bou-

langer's successes—not on its own merits and with a view to its permanent effect on the country, but in its relation to an individual politician. Important as the issue was, the Ministry itself failed to come to any collective agreement as to the policy to be pursued. M. Jules Ferry, the premier, and three of his colleagues were in favour of the *Scrutin d'Arrondissement*; but three others were staunch advocates of the *Scrutin de Liste*. The question came on for discussion on the 19th of May 1881.

The debate was opened, in accordance with French usage, by the reading of a report on the proposed measure. That report was hostile. M. Bardoux set himself to refute its arguments. He was answered by a certain M. Roger. Next Gambetta ascended the tribune. He began by disclaiming, in dignified terms, all those views of personal ambition which had been imputed to him; and then, with the lucidity and method which characterised his oratory, he set forth in array the arguments in favour of the *Scrutin de Liste*, its superiority to small local interests, its larger, more national character.

> The future is in your hands [he cried, in conclusion], for it depends on the issue now before you. It is for you to decide whether the Republic shall be fruitful and progressive, or vacillating and insecure among contending parties; it is for you to decide whether there shall or shall not arise a true Government party, homogeneous, practical, which shall lead France to the crowning of her glorious destinies. . . . I adjure you to think of the country. Review the faults, the abuses, the impotence of the *régime* to which we are condemned; and consider, on the other hand, the torrent of force, of power, of energy that you can draw from the full flowing tide of the national sovereignty; and then you will not hesitate to instantly abolish a *régime* without possibility of life.

The Chamber, after listening to this address—

which Time has so entirely falsified — passed the Bill.* No opposition of a really serious character was expected on the part of the Senate. Everything seemed going in accordance with Gambetta's wishes; and on the 24th of May he left Paris for Cahors, his native town, where he was to unveil a monument to the *Mobiles* of the department who had fallen during the war. A pleasant expedition, as may be supposed: addresses at the places where the train stopped, flowers in profusion—flowers of nature and flowers of rhetoric; at Cahors itself the most enthusiastic reception; Gambetta's father and the notabilities of the town at the station; addresses of all kinds; illuminations, in which the house of his birth was not forgotten; a visit to the Lycée, where he listens to an address from the head boy, and looks back in half rueful retropsect to the days when he had been a school-boy there himself—not always as good a boy as he might have been, he tells the lads; then again speeches, banquets; the city, in short, over-bubbling with pride and pleasure at the glory of its distinguished son, and all going "happy as a marriage bell."

* Nothing can better illustrate the hopeless disarray of French parties than the following table of the numbers who voted on the First Article of M. Bardoux's bill:—

	For the *Scrutin de Liste.*	For the *Scrutin d'Arrondissement.*
Extreme Left	21	16
Republican Union	96	44
Left	69	61
Left Centre	16	15
Bonapartists	44	32
Legitimists	21	34
Totals	267	202

But this display of local enthusiasm, natural as it was, afforded ample material for the calumnies of Gambetta's enemies. They made political capital out of it diligently, affecting to call him the Czar, and to regard him as aiming at supreme power. When he came back to Paris, after an absence of eight days, he found that matters were not at all where he had left them, and that the question of the *Scrutin de Liste* was more than in peril. The opponents of the measure displayed extraordinary activity. President Grévy was openly represented as adverse to it; and there seems no room for doubt that he was so in reality. On the 19th of June the Senate threw out the Bill.

On the 29th of July the session came to an end, and also the Parliament, for a general election was to take place on the 21st of August. Gambetta, in order to disprove the charge so freely made that he was aiming at a dictatorship, decided to present himself for election to two Paris constituencies only. He spoke twice in view of the coming struggle: once at Tours on the 4th of August, when he advocated a reform of the Senate—a reform which he had declared to be anything but pressing when speaking at Cahors before the rejection of the *Scrutin de Liste*; and again in Paris on the 12th of August to the constituents of the XXth *Arrondissement*. The latter was a most important speech. One passage especially deserves to be reproduced here, notwithstanding its length, because it contains so clear an exposition of his policy from the date when he had entered public life.

I know well [he said] why I am attacked—it is not as an individual; there are some who even say that as an individual I am not altogether a bad fellow—it is as the embodiment of a policy, a

system, a method of defending and protecting the interests of French Democracy. And it is that policy which I am here to defend, not because it is attacked, but because I have an intense desire to prevent men of honest minds and loyal hearts, who from their position labour under certain social and political disadvantages, from being led astray by sophists and demagogues. That is why I wish to explain my views here, and why I am anxious that the policy I advocate should receive once more at Belleville its sanction and consecration. That policy has been called by an ill-sounding and barbarous name. The thing itself having been misconceived, it was necessary to find for it a misconceived epithet: it was called "Opportunism." If this barbarous word means a policy of enlightenment, a policy that never suffers the favourable moment, the propitious circumstances, to go by, a policy that is neither at the mercy of chance nor violence —why, our opponents may apply to it any ill-sounding or even unintelligible epithet they like, but I shall declare that I can recognise none other, for it is the policy of right reason, and, I will add, the policy of success. Yes, since I entered upon public life, I have not contented myself with studying the general history of that great and unfortunate country which is called France; I have also studied the history of our party, and that not only since 1789, but in the old dark days when Democracy still spoke with the lisp of childhood. I have tracked our party as though by the marks of its blood, have followed its advances, its failures, its acts of unreason, followed all too swiftly by periods of reaction. And having done this I solemnly resolved that I should teach to others the lesson I had learnt, and tell why the great and admirable cause of Republican Democracy has had, throughout the course of our history, not only chronic periods of growth, but, alas! chronic periods of failure and decay; and it appears to me clear as the noonday that the reason why our party, notwithstanding all the glory of its Democratic heroism, has failed so constantly in the sphere of practical affairs, is because it has too often followed a visionary mirage and yielded to the spirit of rashness and violence; and because, also, the governing classes, the rest of France, have yielded to the worst, the basest of social passions—to fear; to fear, which, in politics, is a terrible national vice of ours; to fear, which is a nation's worst counsellor; to fear, which so often led the middle classes, before the adoption of the policy I am now advocating, to obstinately and blindly oppose all ideas of political enfranchisement; to fear, which at the slightest public excitement caused the streets to be immediately filled with armed men, the invariable conclusion being misery and death on the one hand, and on the other, the abject victory of a cynical and apostate

reaction. This is what led me to do my utmost to cut such a past adrift, and to determine that I would devote my life to disarming that spirit of violence which has so often led Democracy astray, to withdrawing Democracy from the evil influence of abstract formulæ, to directing it to the study of facts, of concrete realities, to teaching it to take account of tradition, of custom, of prejudice ; for prejudice is a power, and not to be crushed, but dissipated by persuasion and reason. I said, I will teach my party to hate the spirit of violence; I will do my utmost to blunt the evil goad of terror that drives reaction on its course. I will present myself—and that is how we obtained our first successes—I will present myself as a kind of mediator between the one party and the other; and if I can, at last, effect an alliance between the people and the middle class, I shall have given to Republican order a foundation never to be moved.

Having thus eloquently expounded the principles of Opportunism to the democracy of Belleville, Gambetta proceeded to explain at length the reforms which he considered urgent—reforms in the administration of justice, reforms in the army, reforms in education, reforms in matters ecclesiastical, reforms in matters financial, reforms in the civil administration generally, reforms in the laws relating to the combination of workmen—a budget of reforms, indeed, quite sufficient, as one might have supposed, to satisfy the most hungry reformer. But not sufficient altogether to satisfy the people of Belleville. Though the meeting of the 12th of August heard him gladly, another meeting, convened for the 16th of August, and to which he proposed to speak on social questions, refused to hear him at all. They howled, they shouted, they yelled, every time he tried to open his mouth. One adventurous spirit hissed in an ear-piercing manner. Whereupon Gambetta, nothing daunted, after several ineffectual efforts to obtain a hearing, shouted back to them that the man with a shrill whistle was a "coward," and the rest "drunken" and "irresponsible" "slaves," and, having

thus delivered himself, left the place in high dudgeon. It was his first popular check. Nevertheless, on the 21st he was elected by one of the two constituencies of the XXth *Arrondissement*. Belleville, spite of the efforts of the ultra-Radicals, had not yet deserted its great representative.

Gambetta travelled into Germany at the end of September; was back again in Paris on the 10th of October; on the 12th or 13th had an interview with President Grévy, in which the question of his imminent succession to the Premiership seems first to have been mooted; then went into Normandy, speaking as was his wont; and on the 28th was in Paris once more for the meeting of the new Parliament.

By that time it was generally known that M. Ferry's Ministry was moribund. On the 9th of November, after a four days' debate on the expedition to Tunis, the Chamber refused to give him a vote of confidence.* Then followed a scene of great parliamentary confusion. For two hours motion after motion was proposed and rejected. It seemed as if the Chamber had neither definite purpose nor power of expression. Then Gambetta, who had not previously spoken, went to the tribune. It was a solemn moment in his own history, one may almost say again in the history of France. By endeavouring to give to the Chamber an articulate voice at this particular juncture, he was openly putting himself forward as its leader, and declaring his readiness to assume the reins of power. That he had counted the cost, though not, perhaps the whole cost, seems clear. He knew what a short-lived thing a French ministry is. He had had

* Technically, according to French forms, to vote "the order of the day" pure and simple.

experience enough to show him how soon a French public man is played out, when once he exchanges the place of the critic for that of the criticised. With his profound knowledge of the French democracy, he can scarcely have been ignorant of its jealousy of the statesman in power. Had he been disposed to forget all this, there were his enemies openly exultant at the thought that he was ascending what they hoped and expected would prove to be the "Tarpeian rock." Nor, to those who judged dispassionately, did he seem bound in honour to accept office at this particular time. The mode of election for which he had passionately pleaded as essential to good government had been rejected. The Chamber with which he would have to deal was a Chamber elected under the hated *Scrutin d'Arrondissement*, and it had just shown itself to be utterly incapable of discipline. Nevertheless, he ascended the tribune, and slowly, sadly, in but very few words, proposed an "order of the day," vindicating the honour of France, and declaring that she must remain true to her engagements. On the following day, the 10th of November, he was commissioned by M. Grévy to form a ministry.

That Ministry had long been looked for with a mighty expectation. It was to be a "Ministry of all the talents," a ministry consisting for the most part of ex-prime ministers, or ex-presidents, a ministry of ministries, a *Grand Ministère*. That such a body would have been remarkable for coherence or unity of action seems unlikely, and there is reason to believe that the suggestion of the *Grand Ministère* had first been thrown out in derision, and as an invention of the enemy. But the notion had caught the popular fancy, and Gambetta appears to have considered it

his duty to try to realise it. He went to M. Say, the President of the Senate; but they were unable to agree on financial matters. He then went to M. de Freycinet; but that somewhat enigmatical person would give him no assistance. M. Brisson and M. Challemel-Lacour also intimated that their co-operation was not to be expected. Then it became useless to apply to M. Ferry, who had just been defeated over the Tunis question, and the idea of the *Grand Ministère* had to be abandoned. Gambetta, nothing daunted, turned to the group of his followers, and got together a ministry composed, for the most part, of men comparatively unknown, who had never held office before. Their names were received with anything but enthusiasm. Here was a falling off, indeed! Hyperion to a satyr—this a *Grand Ministère*, forsooth! The country felt baulked of its due; and the Premier's enemies naturally made capital out of the general disappointment, crying that he was surrounding himself with mediocrities in order to exercise an unchecked dictatorship.

Nor from the first did the new Ministry make any way with the Chamber Their opening address, read by Gambetta on the 15th of November, was coldly received. On the 24th, the Minister of the Interior, M. Waldeck-Rousseau, exasperated the majority of members by sending a circular to the prefects in which he boldly told them that their duty was to the Central Government, that they were the depositaries of all local authority; and that, for himself, he intended to send back any local applications presented to him direct by members, and not forwarded through the prefects. The members to have no power in their own districts, and no patron-

age! Here was a revolution which they could ill brook. From that moment many of them felt that Gambetta must be deposed, and that soon. Meanwhile, until that happy consummation, it was obviously right that he should be harried. In his large desire for the development of all the resources of France, he had created two new and essentially useful ministries—a ministry of agriculture and a ministry of arts. The appointments were gravely opposed on the 8th of December as involving a violation of the Constitution. In his equally large desire to put an end at last to the ostracism which the Republican party had exercised towards its erewhile adversaries, he had appointed an able publicist, M. Weiss, to a high post in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and had allowed the War Minister to appoint a particularly efficient officer, General de Miribel, as Chief of the Staff. Evidently such appointments—so argued his enemies—could only have been made in view of a *coup d'état*. There was one perfectly absurd member who, during the course of a short discussion about them, even hurled at him the epithets of "Cæsar" and "Vitellius."

Gambetta was not the man to be disturbed by this outrageous folly, except in so far as it gave evidence that his position was being undermined. Even with this knowledge, he and his colleagues went on with their administrative and legislative labours as if they felt secure of holding office for an indefinite period. M. Reinach gives an account, in some detail, of the reforms to which they applied themselves—reforms real and desirable for the most part—and the list is distinctly creditable as a monument of human energy. There were to be reforms in the army and

navy; reforms in the magistracy, and a reduction of redundant magistrates; similar reforms in the civil service, and a wholesale dismissal of unnecessary placemen; reforms in the relation of the State to the great railway companies; reforms in matters financial, educational, agricultural, colonial, ecclesiastical; and reforms, above all, in the Constitution, of which a word or two presently. Here was a "ministry of battle" of a new kind—a ministry of battle against abuses. No wonder that all these leagued interests set themselves in array to resist such an onset. Nor is it without significance that M. Wilson, President Grévy's son-in-law, since convicted as an arch jobber, was one of the chief leaders of the host.

The Chambers separated on the 16th of December 1881, and on the 14th of January 1882, six days after they had reassembled, the indefatigable Gambetta was ready with a plan for the revision of the Constitution. His proposals bore on several points, which need not here be particularised, relating to the mode of election for the Senate; but the chief proposal of all, the great rock ahead, was a return to the *Scrutin de Liste*. As soon as this was announced murmurs broke forth. A Commission was appointed, according to usage, to examine the Bill; and, very ominously, of the thirty-three members nominated, thirty-two were hostile. The Commission decided to hear Gambetta, and he appeared before them on the 21st of January; when his explanations were deemed so little satisfactory that one excited and ridiculous member rushed out of the room "with terror in his looks, his hair dishevelled, and pale as death," crying "It 's a *coup d'état!* It 's a revolution in the streets! What are we coming to? The world is turned

topsy-turvy. I feel as if I were walking on my head! It 's the organisation of insurrection!" Another childish member besought a group of journalists standing by, "in the name of the Republic," not to tell the people how "deplorable" was the attitude of the President of the Council. With men's minds in this condition, what reasonable issue could be anticipated? The great debate took place on the 26th of January, and turned for the most part on the question, not of *Scrutin de Liste* at all, though that was paramount in all thoughts, but of the legitimate powers of the Congress of the two Chambers when assembled for the purpose of revising the Constitution. Gambetta spoke with superb power and effect. There was a kind of indignant pathos in his voice as he repudiated the odious accusation of aiming at personal dictatorship:—

To your apprehensions I can but oppose my own uprightness, the sincerity of my words, the legislative measures we have prepared, my whole past—and I appeal to your consciences. Nor can I believe that that Republican legion with which I began my career, with which I have fought and suffered, will fail us in the day of success any more than it failed us in the day of battle. In any case, I shall bow to your verdict without bitterness, and, above all, without the shadow of a feeling of personal resentment. For, whatever may have been said to the contrary, there is something that I prize more than any other object of ambition, however legitimate, and that is, the confidence of the Republicans, without which I should not be able to accomplish what is—and I have some right to say so—my allotted task, the rehabilitation of our country.

The answer to this was an adverse majority of 282 to 227 votes; and on the same evening Gambetta placed his resignation in the hands of President Grévy.

Thus fell, after sixty-six days of existence, the Ministry to which France had looked forward with

such sanguine hopes. It fell before a coalition of the Extreme Left and of the Right, and of such members of the Radical and Democratic Left as clung to the *Scrutin d'Arrondissement* because that mode of election gave them more personal patronage and power. It fell, therefore, as one may fairly say, before a coalition of political incapacity and private greed. It fell after so short a lease of life, and, in one sense, so easily, that many people came to the conclusion at the time, as many people have come to the conclusion since, that Gambetta from the first had never meant it to stand, and sought the earliest decent opportunity of letting it go to pieces. Was it conceivable, so people have argued, that a politician so astute should insist upon carrying the *Scrutin de Liste* in that particular Chamber if he had any intention of remaining in power? Was he not, of set design, playing to lose? But here, I think, a great distinction must be made. That Gambetta attached an altogether exaggerated importance to the *Scrutin de Liste* is unquestionable. *Scrutin de Liste* is no more a universal panacea for all the ills to which political flesh is heir than Universal Suffrage or the Republic. Selfishness and greed, if greatly prevalent in the constituencies, will find an issue under one mode of election as well as under another. Experience here speaks with no uncertain voice. France went back for a time to the *Scrutin de Liste* after Gambetta's death, and there was not the slightest improvement in the character of her representative Assembly. Moreover, Gambetta, in advocating the change, obviously failed to grasp its inherent danger, and to perceive what a weapon of destruction he was placing in the hand of any designing popular politician. Perfectly honest in his own

intentions, he wanted power for the purpose of building up and purifying the Republic. Others might want power for quite difierent purposes. But the point I wish to insist upon here is not so much the inherent value of his opinions on the *Scrutin de Liste*, as his attitude of mind when pressing it forward. That attitude, so far as one can judge, seems to have been this: "I have been accused for months past"—so he would say to himself—"of exercising an occult and unconstitutional influence. Well, I have been called upon to form a responsible ministry, and have done so. It is, however, scarcely believable—judging from the character of the Chamber—that my ministry can live. Yet I will do my best. But in order to keep in power I shall certainly bate not one jot of the reforms I consider essential to the good of the country, *Scrutin de Liste* among the first. The chances are that I shall fall anyhow, and that soon, whether I finesse, and adjourn important questions, and try to play one party against another, or whether I pursue a bold, straightforward course. But in the latter case I so fall that at some future date, in the country's sore need, I may again have power to do her service." To this extent, and this only, can he be supposed, I think, to have "speculated for the fall."

"Without bitterness, and, above all, without the shadow of a feeling of personal resentment"—so had Gambetta declared that he would accept the verdict of the Chamber. He at once resumed the chief editorship of the *République Française*, took steps to see that his various projects of reform should not be lost to the country, and devoted much time to his duties as president of a commission on recruiting for the army. Twice only does he seem to have reappeared at the

tribune—once on the 1st of June 1882, and again on the 18th of July, the questions in debate on both occasions being the eternal Egyptian question. And here, perhaps, it may not be amiss to say a word with regard to certain matters of foreign policy on which he thought constantly, yet spoke very seldom. What had been his attitude during the war, we have seen. In the "Terrible Year" there had been no stauncher advocate of resistance to the bitter end. But when once peace had been declared, he recognised immediately that if France was to regain her place among the nations she must walk circumspectly, and cultivate great prudence of speech. With what must have been a strong effort—for he had the orator's temperament in superabundant measure—he set a curb upon his tongue, and carefully abstained during the succeeding years from uttering any words at which Prussia could take umbrage. But though he held that France, in view of her great defeat, ought to be wary, he was far from desiring that she should step out of the European Concert altogether, and permanently abandon her place as one of the Great Powers. To say that he ceased to think of her lost provinces would not be true. He thought of them constantly, and never lost the hope that they might sooner or later be regained, either by arms, or diplomacy, or a generous recognition on the part of Germany that their capture had been a mistake. Meanwhile, he would advocate every measure tending to place France in the position she had occupied before the war. He approved of the expedition to Tunis as extending her influence in the Mediterranean, and had no objection to England's compensatory acquisition of Cyprus. He supported with all his power the dual action of England

and France in Egypt—that dual action which was so foolishly abandoned by his successor, M. de Freycinet. Indeed, with regard to England his attitude was always cordial. He held that England and France, each in their several spheres, were the world's two great liberalising and civilising influences. This is how he spoke of the English alliance in almost the last words of the last speech he ever made—words uttered at a time when he certainly had no reason to anticipate that he was marked out for death, and yet words that have in them an almost prophetic ring:—

Gentlemen,—For the last ten years there has been a western policy in Europe represented by England and France, and allow me to say here that I know of no other European policy likely to avail us in the most terrible of the contingencies we may have to face hereafter. And what I am now saying to you, I say with the most profound conviction that I am seeing clearly into the future. [*Murmurs. to the Extreme Left.*] Those who interrupt me can come to this place and give their reasons for believing that I know nothing of foreign politics; but this, at least, I have a right to say: that both before and after the war of 1870 I have had no more engrossing and constant object—and an object, I pray you to mark well, superior to all personal and party interests—than the security of France; and I should loathe myself—I should, in my own estimation, for ever forfeit the right of speaking in her councils—if I were capable of allowing anything to weigh for a moment in the balance with her future and her greatness. Well, I have seen enough to entitle me to say this: At the cost of whatever sacrifices, never break with the English alliance Ah! I know what men will say, and I will speak here with the utmost frankness and lay my whole thoughts bare before you. I am certainly an enlightened and sincere friend of the English, but not to the extent of the sacrifice of French interests. Moreover, be assured that the English, being the capable politicians that they are, only respect those allies who respect themselves and know how to take care of their own interests. And in this very case—and here, I tell you all, I have nothing to hide—what induces me to seek for the English alliance, for the co-operation of England in the basin of the Mediterranean and in Egypt, is—and I pray you to mark me well—is that what I most apprehend, in addition to an ill-omened estrangement, is that you

should deliver over to England, and for ever, territories, and rivers, and waterways, where your right to live and traffic is equal to her own.

Gambetta had purchased a house called Les Jardies at Ville-d'Avray, not far from Versailles on the Paris side. It was a modest residence enough, consisting of nothing more sumptuous than the outlying buildings of the *Château d'opéra comique* * which Balzac had inhabited from 1838 to 1842, and where the great novelist had written apace, and dreamt of millions amid a bewildering entanglement of debt. Here, in semi-rural, semi-suburban felicity, Gambetta was living in the autumn of 1882. That he had taken his dismissal from office quite without a feeling of bitterness it would probably be too much to affirm; and there seem to be indications, such as an occasional ruffling of the hitherto admirable temper, that he was not altogether in good physical or mental condition.† Still he does not appear to have been unduly depressed. He was, as he had ever been, a delightful companion, a "charmeur," as the French say, and in conversation most brilliant. He had "troops of friends," all greatly devoted to him. Apart from his absorbing political interests, he possessed the resources of a cultivated literary and artistic taste. M. Zola, indeed, calls him "more Philistine than the Philistine Thiers," because he failed to appreciate the "naturalist" literature of which M. Zola is the apostle. Yet even M. Zola is constrained to admit that he had a zeal, however narrow and hide-bound, for the "Antique and the Renaissance" in art,

* So Balzac described it. The curious will find a full account of the place in his correspondence.

† He had for some time been growing stout and unwieldy. There seems to have been clear physical failure.

and for "the classics" in literature. And I think the following extract from a letter,* written by him in 1873, after a visit to a picture gallery in Brussels, may be taken as showing that in his appreciation of art he was not such a "Philistine" after all. The description of Millet's "Angelus" is particularly sympathetic, and the recognition of the value of English painting might serve as a useful lesson to many professed French art-critics.

The Wilson gallery is specially remarkable for its landscapes. Standing distinct from the Flemings, who hold an unobtrusive place, one may fitly praise the three great representatives of the contemporary French school, Dupré, Rousseau, and F. Millet. The first, with his romantic fervour, triumphs in three landscapes, full of vigour and boldness. Rousseau gives us his immortal "Forest of Fontainebleau" . . . in which he shows us a kind of pictorial Virgil, imparting to the forest of our ancient kings the brightness, the colouring, the very poetry that the great Mantuan shed over Tempe. Millet appears here with all his marked characteristics as the painter of the seasons, of the fields, of the peasantry.

The "Angelus"—that masterpiece, in which two peasants stand bathed in the pale rays of the setting sun, and bow in mystic fervour as the tinkle of the bell ringing to evening prayer comes stealing from yon monastery on the horizon—the "Angelus" forces us to think of the still powerful influence of religious traditions among the rural population. With what minuteness, and yet with what breadth, do these two grand figures of the peasant and his servant stand before us in the still glowing field. The day's work is over. There is the wheelbarrow full of its harvestage; they are about to return to the cottage for the night. The bell has rung the curfew of labour, and immediately these two mysterious animals, as La Bruyère would call them, rise from the soil and stand there motionless. They are waiting for, and counting, each stroke of the bell, as they did yesterday, as they will do to-morrow, in an attitude too natural not to be habitual. . . . The fleecy, melancholy sky hanging over the landscape emphasises the pensiveness of the rest of the composition.

It is an admirable scene, and has a wide significance. You feel that the artist is not merely a painter—that he is moved by the passions and problems of his age, that he has his part in them, and that

* Published in the *Times* of July the 9th, 1889.

what he feels and thinks he carries on to his canvas. Painting, as thus understood, ceases to be only an appeal to the eye. It rises to higher things, moralising and educating. The artist draws a kind of inspiration from his own citizenship, and in addition to a grand and noble picture, you get a lesson in social and political morality.

What is very unusual, the English occupy, and justly so, the most distinguished place in this gallery. Turner, Constable, and Reynolds represent with sovereign majesty the art of their country. Turner shows more of reason and restraint than in the works of his which you may see in his native land. Constable displays that genuine feeling for nature which made of him the father of the "naturalist" school of painting—which led him to cast aside all conventions, artifices, all pseudo Greek and Roman idealisations, and to see and understand and admire grass and water and trees in their own great beauty; and, having seen and remembered, to fix . . . on canvas the vagueness of Nature's outlines, and the variableness of her tints—anxious only to secure two things: truth of light and truth of form. Such was Constable, and such he shows himself in this fine gallery; and it is not without emotion that we have here revived our memories of a man but for whom the great school of French landscape painters might perchance be still copying and diluting the art left to us by Lesueur, Poussin, Vernet, Girodet, and the other lovers of Greek temples amid . . . pasteboard trees.

But the gem of the collection . . . is the Reynolds, for everything is to be found in this marvellous picture of his, just as Nature and Humanity are epitomised in Millet's "Angelus." And here, too, we have Nature, in the fresh shade of an immense English park, and Humanity in all the grace of maternal love. . . . A young widow, beautiful exceedingly, is playing with the baby (Gambetta wrote the word in English) seated on her lap. She sees in its features the image of a loved husband; and, as though the child were unconsciously imitating some gesture of its dead father, it lifts its chubby little pink hand to the mother's chin. Even in her sorrow she cannot help smiling. And the smile, like a flower suddenly unfolding in the midst of a storm, brings to the memory those splendid lines in which Homer tells how Hector's young wife, as she bade the hero . . . farewell, smiled through her tears when the child Astyanax played all unconscious . . . with the plume on his father's helmet. In the moist yet happy eyes of Reynolds's widow are mingled sad memories and pleasing hopes—the hopes bound up in the full strength and promise of the active little creature she holds in her lap. It is impossible to give better expression to what is noble and pathetic in family life.

All things end, and all things begin again. Flowers spring up and

flourish on graves. And, after all, what to Nature, which knows no end, are our joys, our griefs, our disappointments? She is for ever inexhaustible. We, in her hands, are but as material which she tries and rejects in the process of her divine architecture. Our pride, our duty, our honour, and also our reward, consist in understanding her, and, if possible, helping her forward; but, at all events, in appearing and departing with an equal fortitude and an equal impassiveness.

M. Daudet, too, may be taken as a witness of the interest Gambetta took in the things of the spirit:

Gambetta [he says] was one of the very few politicians who care for art, and suspect that letters really do occupy some little place in a nation's life. . . . I met him once again. . . . There was no explanation between us [M. Daudet, it will be remembered, had attacked him with some violence after the war]. He came to me holding out both his hands; it was at Ville-d'Avray, at the house of Alphonse Lemerre, the publisher, the house so long inhabited by the painter Corot. . . . We lunched in the garden, in the open air, among the flowers and the birds, and remained the whole of the afternoon talking of the past. . . . Then we turned to art and literature. Gambetta, I noticed with joy, read everything, looked at everything that was worth looking at, remained what he had been of yore, a skilled connoisseur in art and a lettered critic. Five delightful hours we spent there, in that green and flowery retreat, situated between Paris and Versailles, and yet so remote from all the roar of politics.

This interview took place before Gambetta had purchased his own house at Ville-d'Avray, and consequently before the time of which I am speaking. But still I think M. Daudet's description may be taken as suggesting the kind of life which the deposed Prime Minister was living at Les Jardies when, on the 27th of November, Paris was startled by the announcement that he had been wounded in the hand and forearm by a pistol-shot. All sorts of rumours were immediately afloat: he had tried to commit suicide—there was a woman in the case, and the pistol had been discharged in the midst of a struggle and altercation. The truth seems to be that the accident was an accident merely, and had resulted from the incautious handling

of a loaded weapon. At first the wound seemed to be progressing fairly enough, and no ill results were anticipated. But as the days went on, grave complications set in—serious abdominal derangement, peritonitis, growing weakness. He himself appears to have had no clear notion that his end was approaching. Those about him, however—the medical men who were unremitting in their attention, the friends who loved his great nature, the woman—for there *was* a woman there, who had shared his later life and now never left his side—these can scarcely have retained any illusion. He died with the dying year, at five minutes to twelve on the 31st of December 1882.

Then, above the strife and the hubbub of parties, France raised her great voice. She felt that in losing Gambetta she was losing the most passionately devoted of her sons; the son who, in the hour of her need, had done most for her honour and highest interest. She felt, too, confusedly and yet with a sure instinct, that though he might, during the last few months, have seemed a failure, she would yet, perchance, stand in need of his strong arm at some future time; and then he seemed so young to die, and his death was so sudden! If he had had faults, they were forgotten. When would she see his like again?

That the feeling of the country should find expression in a public funeral was a matter of course. Meanwhile the body lay in state, and thousands, including some of the most illustrious in the land, came sorrowfully to look at the face which bore once again in death the look of youthful serenity and strength that had faded from it in the "Terrible Year." But of posthumous honours, of the wreaths sent in by

hundreds, the imposing funeral procession, the sympathetic and sorrowing crowds, the eloquent addresses at the grave in the Cemetery of Père-Lachaise, —what need to speak at length here? These were the man's due, fairly earned by great services, and they were duly paid. One incident only connected with the funeral ceremonies shall I stop to record, as having a peculiar pathos and significance. On the night before the interment it was the delegates of Alsace and Lorraine who, at their own earnest request, kept watch by the dead.

One incident more, however: though borne to Père-Lachaise on the 4th of January 1883, the body rests otherwhere. Not within sound of the murmur of the great city he had loved so well does Gambetta lie. His father willed it otherwise—whether anxious that in death his son should not be divided from his own people, or by what other reason impelled, I know not. Nor was the old man moved from his determination by the many who held that Paris was the patriot statesman's right place of sepulture. So on the 13th of January the body was conveyed to Nice, and there re-interred, on the following day, in the grave where his mother had lately been laid, and where lay also the aunt by whom he had, in earlier years, been tended with such devotion.

There he rests, if so be that the grave is a resting-place, in the high terraced cemetery, with the blue southern sky above, and the bluer Mediterranean below —in a place, for its beauty, not unfit to be a great man's last home, and yet surely less appropriate as the last home of Gambetta than a grave within sound of the central beating heart of France.

CHAPTER X.

CONCLUSION.

Objects for which Gambetta strove—The Empire—The War—The establishment of the Republic—Where he was wrong—Democracy—His eloquence—His supreme honour.

FOURTEEN years, from the 14th of November 1868 to 31st of December 1882, so long and no longer had it taken to exhaust Gambetta's exuberant vitality. He was a young man of thirty at the earlier of these dates; he was only forty-four when he died; and yet within the short intervening space what a throng of events, and what unceasing labours and anxieties! Twice he had been, without question, the foremost man in France: once during his dictatorship in the year of the war, and again when he was leading the Republican forces to victory over the various Monarchical parties. That his prestige and influence had suffered some decline with the fall of his Ministry is undeniable; but it was a decline that had in it all the promise of a new and ampler day. Had he lived till now, there seems little doubt that France, in her sore need and dearth of men, would have turned to him again as her one real statesman.

With regard to the value of his life-work, and the

means by which it was effected, there is room unquestionably for a wide difference of opinion. He started on his public career with three great objects of worship—fetishes, as one may say. The first was the French Revolution, which he regarded as the great era of emancipation for the human race. The second was Universal Suffrage, which he held to be, not indeed the *vox dei,* for there was no *deus* in his philosophy, but the rightful source of all political power. And the third was the Republic, which he considered as the only form of government allowing to the will of the people free and unfetterd sway. With these objects of worship the Empire was incompatible. It might boast itself the descendant of the Revolution and the offspring of Universal Suffrage; but obviously there was a bar sinister somewhere, and towards Universal Suffrage in particular it was in the habit of behaving in a very unfilial manner, while with the Republic it was at deadly feud. So to the fiery young paladin of the Baudin trial the Empire was as a blatant beast to be exterminated at all hazards. Nor, whatever view be taken of the ultimate dangers inherent in his mode of attack, can it be said, I think, that his hostility was not justified. As I have already endeavoured to show, the government founded by Louis Napoleon had no real root in the country, no power of bearing fruit for the healing of the nation. Those who helped to cut it down were not blameworthy.

Then came the war, and here Gambetta played a part which, however vilified at the time, was grand and heroic. If France emerged from her troubles and disasters uncrushed as a nation, with her superb past uncancelled, and with possibilities of a great future still before her, she owes it mainly to him. He it was

who taught her not to despair, even in her darkest hour; he it was who made her enemies understand that, though defeated, she was not to be trampled on with impunity.

After the war, the nature of his task changed. He himself was for the time discredited by the failure of his military efforts; and the hideous insurrection of the Commune had naturally shed a very baleful light on the Radical cause to which he was attached. Moreover, the majority of the Assembly governing France was Monarchical and reactionary. To show that he himself was no mere fire-brand, that the Republican party had no necessary connection with insurrection and disorder, and that the Republican form of government was that which France must necessarily adopt—these were the objects he kept steadily in view. And one can but admire the skill and general prudence with which he carried them out. Diversely as his career may be judged, scarcely anyone would say that from 1871 to 1882 he did not prove himself to be a sane and responsible statesman. Notwithstanding all provocations, he kept the Republican party within strictly legal bounds while the Monarchists were using all their efforts to upset the Republic, and he demonstrated the superiority of that form of government by the best of practical arguments—by giving his opponents room and verge enough to show that they could establish no other.

With the final defeat of the Monarchists his task changed, to some extent, again. He had no longer to conduct his forces to the attack of a hostile position. But as he had had to teach to those forces discipline in battle, so now he had to induce them to use moderation in victory, and that without exciting a suspicion

that he himself was lukewarm in the good cause. Hence his "Opportunism." Hence, too, in great part, his defeat, for the Reactionists opposed him because they knew that at heart he was a Democratic Radical, with Democratic Radical ends in view, while the Democratic Radicals blamed him for sloth and apathy.

Thus, then, to recapitulate, he was right in thinking that the Empire must be swept away, and that a Republic was the best form of government for France. He was right, too, grandly right, in his course during the war. He was right afterwards in his desire to restrain the wild ardour of his party, and teach them the ways of compromise and moderation. Where, then, was he wrong?—for wrong somewhere he presumably must have been, seeing that the success of the policy which he may be said, speaking generally, to have advocated, has led Republicanism in France to its present most doubtful position.

He was wrong in his fetish-worship—wrong in not having sufficiently assimilated his own Opportunist philosophy to see that Universal Suffrage, the Republic, the Organisation of the Democracy, are, at best, but means to an end, and that if they do not conduce to the establishment of a sound and just polity, they are but as small dust in the balance. He was wrong in thinking that it was possible to found a stable government on the mere reasoning power—such as it is—of the majority, divorced from all sane tradition and the humanising influences of the past. He was wrong in the foolish optimism which led him to believe that the general vote would necessarily be exercised for the general good, and that universal sovereignty might be made to mean universal wisdom. He was wrong, in short, in being—spite of

his surface Opportunism—a disciple of the eighteenth century, and regarding man as an abstract being compounded of reason alone, and to be governed by an appeal to that one faculty.

We are witnessing in France—not to say elsewhere—a strong movement towards democracy. What that movement may lead to, none can tell. Whether it will result, as its advocates hold, in a juster apportionment of life's burdens and pleasures, and a real advance in man's development; or whether its outcome will be, as the pessimists among us see reason to fear, a temporary retrogression to something like barbarism—these are matters on which the Future alone can speak with an authoritative voice. One thing, however, seems pretty certain—that if the democratic movement is to end in anything but disaster, it must be effected slowly, step by step, here a little and there a little, and with infinite diffidence. And this is no mere saw of insular Conservatism. It is a deduction, as one may say, from Nature's method of work, and of general application. Nor did Gambetta, as experience taught him its lessons, fail to see such truths altogether; but whether driven onwards in a vain attempt to conciliate his party, or by native impatience of temperament, he failed to grasp them to sufficient purpose, and he has, alas! not left behind him a firmly constituted Republic.

Of what may be called his tactical mistakes in the great parliamentary campaigns of the last eleven years of his life I have already spoken, and need not speak again at any length here. It was a mistake to weaken Thiers by supporting the election of M. Barodet in 1873. It was a mistake to argue that the Assembly of 1871 had no right to establish a perma-

nent constitution, and then, when it suited his purpose, to accept a constitution from that same Assembly. It was a mistake to outrage the religious feeling of France, and alienate whole classes of citizens, by his repeated attacks on "Clericalism." It was a mistake to countenance the sacrificing of hecatombs of permanent officials to the desire of his party for places and pelf. It was a mistake to perpetuate and envenom old feuds by such measures as the wholesale invalidation of hostile elections. It was a mistake—but why continue the catalogue? Who in such troublous waters as the politics of France from 1871 to 1882 could have guided his bark without shipping a sea here and there? Rather should we dwell on the general skill and courage of Gambetta's pilotage. Rather should we specially mark that amid all the temptations to which French Radicals are specially exposed, he resolutely set himself against Socialism, Communism, Cosmopolitanism, and similar quackeries. As regards the essential bases of human society he spoke ever with no uncertain voice.

And what an eloquent voice it was! To judge of an orator by his reported speeches, as the future will have perforce to judge of Gambetta's eloquence, is always to some extent unjust. It is not merely that the printed page fails to reproduce the personality of the speaker, his voice, his action, the fervour and passion which he throws into his words—all, in short, that make of a delivered speech a living thing. It is that the art of the orator is essentially different from the art of the writer, that he instinctively arranges his subject in broader, bolder masses, and avoids its depths and subtleties as being difficult of ready apprehension, and, therefore, not adapted to his purpose.

Thus the speech which in the delivery may have been admirably effective, may to the reader seem over-emphasised, redundant in exposition, and of the surface. All this should in justice be remembered when judging the eleven volumes of Gambetta's collected speeches. They are not literature, but oratory, and as such they should be estimated. And when so estimated, it is impossible not to recognise what an admirable speaker the man was. Apart from a voice of magnificent power and compass, he had great gifts. He knew how to arrange his subject on broad lines which no one could mistake. He knew how to make the mere exposition of his case as effective as a serried argument. He had at command, and, what is rarer still, strictly under command, a great array of eloquent and overwhelming words. No speaker possessed in a higher degree the faculty of crystallising a whole situation into one flashing sentence. No speaker was more ready under the fire of interruption. Of course there are points at which other great orators have surpassed him. He had not Bright's charm of simplicity and naturalness, nor Bright's touches of pathos. He could not wing a shaft of ridicule like Beaconsfield. Thiers' flawless lucidity, Jules Favre's elegance of diction, these lay beyond him. For mere gladiatorial skill, the faculty of seizing the weakest point in his opponent's case, and presenting the strongest point in his own, Mr. Gladstone was and is more than his rival. Mirabeau's was unquestionably the louder thunder. But, take him for all in all, as a popular platform orator, as a parliamentary speaker gaining the ear of a hostile assembly, as a debater, as a master of scathing rhetoric, as a statesman using speech for the purposes of government, he fairly holds his own

against all comers. And there are some of his patriotic utterances that have in them the ring as of a trumpet blast.

Such utterances came straight from his heart. They were the very voice of the intense and passionate love he bore to France. Whether, with a longer lease of life, and new opportunities, it would have been given to him to render his country the supreme service of permanently settling the form of her government, may be doubted. He had patriotism enough and disinterestedness enough to play the part of Washington. But in France, and in this disintegrated nineteenth century of ours, that part offers greater difficulties than those which Washington had to face. Nor can it be denied that some of Gambetta's own acts had not tended to make future success more easy. Probably, therefore, he would have failed, as every French statesman has failed in similar attempts for the last hundred years. But against this hypothetical failure must be set his success during the war. Yes, success. True he did not roll back the tide of the German invasion, did not even stay its advance, did not save Alsace and Lorraine. And yet he succeeded in the same sense as the *Revenge* succeeded in her fight with the Spanish fleet at the Azores, or the Six Hundred in their charge through the Valley of Death at Balaklava. He succeeded because he gave to his country a memory of heroic resistance to overwhelming odds, and of undaunted fortitude in disaster. He succeeded because he compelled the world to respect her even in defeat. And therefore, so long as she remains a nation, there will linger about his memory a light of honour and grateful pride.

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